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AUTUMN 1999 VOL. 68, NO. 4

Life is our dictionary.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "The American Scholar," 1837

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A Sixteenth-Century Scandal

In 1571, a Flemish lawyer named Jan Rubens was thrown into prison for committing adultery with the Princess of Orange, wife of the most important nobleman in the Netherlands. More than four centuries later, the historian Simon Schama found himself weeping over the letters that Rubens's wife, Maria, wrote to Jan in prison.

Jan and Maria were the parents of the painter Peter Paul Rubens, a central character in Schama's *Rembrandt's Eyes* (forthcoming from Knopf). "The Siegen Affair," an account of Jan's ordeal set against the backdrop of the Dutch Reformation, is based on a chapter in *Rembrandt's Eyes;* it contains a good deal of additional material, including a fuller rendering of Maria's letters, which Schama translated from the Flemish. "Those letters overwhelmed me," says Schama. "I was in tears when I read that Maria had forgiven Jan for what she calls 'your little misdeed,' with the proviso that 'you will love me as you used to, for if I have that, everything else will follow.' We don't have the letters Jan wrote to Maria from his godforsaken cell, but we know that he generally wrote in flowery French peppered with Latin. If I had to choose, I'd rather have Maria's, written with imperfect syntax in the only language she knew, interrupted by her distraught emotions and inner prayers."

Was this instance of adultery in high places more or less scandalous than our own recent example? "More, had it been widely known at the time," says Schama. "Infidelity by the wife of a ruling sovereign was a matter not just of morality but of the integrity of the royal succession. The womb of a princess was her *raison d'être.* Adultery was thus a form of treason." He adds, "What is most extraordinary is that Jan's relationship with the Princess was so staggeringly out of character. He was no Lothario; he was an upright, starchy, pedantic, Bible-quoting magistrate. It's not as if a sixteenth-century Bill Clinton had an affair. It's as if a Kenneth Starr had one."

Three anthologies published this fall include essays from the SCHOLAR. *The Best American Essays 1999,* edited by Edward Hoagland, has three (by Franklin Burroughs, Brian Doyle, and Cynthia Ozick)—more than from any other quarterly. *The Art of the Essay 1999,* edited by Phillip Lopate, has essays by Jonathan Rosen and Philonoë. Rosen's essay also appears in *The Best Spiritual Writing 1999,* edited by Philip Zaleski.

A. F.

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AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

Coleridge the Runaway

PHILONOË

In 1779, when Samuel Taylor Coleridge was seven, he asked his mother to slice him some cheese for toasting: "no easy matter, it being a *crumbly* cheese." His older brother Frank, his great rival in the family, sneaked into the kitchen and, "to disappoint the favorite," minced the cheese into tiny, untoastable pieces. Sam flew at Frank; Frank pretended to be seriously hurt; when Sam bent over him with fearful solicitude, Frank laughed and punched him in the face. At this juncture, Sam grabbed a kitchen knife and was on the verge of reducing his brother to the same condition as the cheese when their mother, the decorous wife of a Devonshire vicar, walked in. "I expected a flogging," recalled the thwarted murderer fifteen years later, "& struggling from her I ran away, to a hill at the bottom of which the Otter flows."

Coleridge spent a stormy night on the riverbank, shivering with cold and fright but reflecting "*at the same time* with inward & gloomy satisfaction, how miserable my Mother must be!" Dozens of villagers combed the churchyard, scoured the streets, dragged the ponds and the millrace. The fugitive awoke at five A.M., too chilled to move. "I saw the Shepherds & Workmen at a distance—& cryed but so faintly, that it was impossible to hear me 30 yards off—and there I might have lain & died—for I was now almost given over." His cries were finally heard by the local squire, Sir Stafford Northcote, who had been searching all night. "He carried me in his arms, for near a quarter of a mile; where we met my father & Sir Stafford's Servants," wrote Coleridge. "I remember, & never shall forget, my father's face as he looked upon me while I lay in the servant's arms—so calm, and the tears stealing down his face: for I was the child of his old age.—My Mother, as you may suppose, was outrageous with joy. . . . I was put to bed—& recovered in a day or so—but I was certainly injured—For I was weakly, & subject to the ague for many years after."

It was the first time, but not the last, that Coleridge ran away. Each successive escape recapitulated pieces of the pattern established in this archetypical truancy: misbehavior; flight; an absence charged with both misery and pleasure; rescue; illness; a tenderly ministered convalescence. The upshot was that he wriggled out of any number of tight spots, but, as often happens when one evades an unpleasant consequence, he was overtaken by another, larger one. "I was certainly injured," he said. He certainly would be again.

Coleridge's night on the riverbank is retold near the beginning of Richard Holmes's two-volume biography (*Early Visions* and *Darker Reflections*), a work so pulsing with life that it sucks the air out of the readers' "real" world, rendering it torpid by comparison, and draws us into a parallel world that seems infinitely richer in oxygen. (This is, of course, exactly what Coleridge did in "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel," whose dreamscapes are vivid enough to trump reality.) That a book should seem more compelling than its readers' lives is in itself no proof of great art. The young mother who ignores her crying baby because she is engrossed in *As the World Turns*, the teenage boy who neglects his homework because he is busy decapitating cyberwarriors in Mortal Kombat, the pedestrian who steps into traffic because his Walkman is playing his favorite song—all have experienced, in ruder forms, something akin to what I felt on reading *Coleridge*. The difference is not just that Holmes is a wonderful writer; it is that he invites us to enter a real life and live it, year by year, alongside a real person. It is impossible to read this

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book without forming opinions of Coleridge's friends as if they were one's own: Charles Lamb is a brick, Robert Southey a bluenose, William Hazlitt an ingrate, William Wordsworth an egotist. (The essential Coleridge-and-Wordsworth scene: A soirée at the Lambs'. Coleridge sits at one end of the dinner table, quoting Wordsworth. Wordsworth sits at the other end, quoting Wordsworth.) And it is impossible to read this book without imagining what it would be like to talk with Coleridge (fascinating), have him as a houseguest (hazardous), walk with him in the Lake Country (fun for the first forty miles), lie with him in a field to study the moonlight (damp).

I half-woke one morning recently with an obscure sense of dread, nagged by the feeling that someone close to me was in trouble. I knew that soon I would be sufficiently alert to remember who it was and start making plans to help him, plans that I feared would be difficult and complex and likely to swallow up my day. I turned over in bed and saw volume 2 of *Coleridge* on my bedside table. It was open to page 350. When I had left him at midnight, Coleridge was lying in a sweat-soaked bed at the Grey Hound Inn in Bath, in December 1813, having argued with two housemates and fled into the night. He was nearly penniless; had missed the last stagecoach and walked five miles in a rainstorm, dragging a bag of books and old clothes; had a terrible cold; and was hallucinating from an opium overdose.

I was relieved. The runaway was someone else's responsibility. Nonetheless, I was unable to settle down to work until I had read far enough ahead to assure myself that Coleridge would be properly taken care of. (As usual, he was. A benevolent local doctor looked after him for two weeks until a rich businessman of Coleridge's acquaintance removed the patient to his house in Bristol. There Coleridge remained for nine months, sharing his capacious bedroom with a manservant specifically charged with suicide prevention. He complained of gout, kidney stones, erysipelas, stricture of the urethra, cirrhosis of the liver, and "angry Itching," from at least some of which, along with opium withdrawal and hypochondriasis, he actually suffered. A year later, restored to health, he commenced writing the *Biographia Literaria.*)

Coleridge's greatest escape took place in 1793, when he was twenty-one. He was a student at Cambridge, deep in debt, wracked with the pains of unrequited love, and frequently drunk. His mortifications ("Mine is a sensibility gangrened with inward corruption") came to a head with the customary decision to run away. William Godwin described what happened: "spends a night in a house of ill-fame, ruminating in a chair: next morning meditates suicide, walks in the park, enlists, sleeps 12 hours on the officer's bed, and upon awaking is offered his liberty, which from a scruple of honour he refuses—marched to Reading—dinnerless on Christmas day, his pocket having been picked by a comrade."

Coleridge had accepted a bounty of six and a half guineas to enlist as a private in the Fifteenth Light Dragoons, under the alias Silas Tomkyn Comberbache. A time-honored way to run away from oneself is, of course, to change one's name. Coleridge never liked "Samuel": "such a vile short plumpness, such a dull abortive smartness in the first Syllable, & this so harshly contrasted by the obscurity & indefiniteness of the syllable Vowel, and the feebleness of the uncovered liquid, with which it ends." In his private notebooks, he referred to himself as S.T.C. or Essteesee; as a writer, he used the pseudonyms Aphilos, Cordomi, Cuddy, Gnome, Idoloclastes Satyrane, Laberius, Nehemiah Higginbottom, Nicias Erythraeus, Ventifrons, and Zagri. Private Comberbache was his most hapless alter ego, a man spectacularly unsuited to his post, barely able to ride a horse and subject to saddle sores that "grimly constellated my Posteriors," but beloved by his fellow soldiers. E. M. Forster described him thus:

> He talked and laughed, didn't mind being teased, changed from subject to subject; he was superb; nothing could stop him when once he had started, and if asked to write a letter for you it was the same: the ink poured out in a torrent, so that by the time she had got to the fourth page the girl couldn't do otherwise than give in. . . . [His] idea that a horse ought to "rub himself down and so shine in all his native beauty"—well, it was the idea of a zany, still when the letter was written and the girl on the way there or back there was no reason you shouldn't brighten

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> his horse up for him; it didn't take long, and you knew which end kicked and which bit, more than he did.

Private Comberbache was eventually removed from his horse and assigned to care for a trooper with smallpox. For eight days and eight nights he and his "poor Comrade" were quarantined in the Pest House, a tiny hut at whose door food and water were left by soldiers too frightened to enter. Comberbache was the perfect nurse, comforting the patient during fevers and hallucinations, "the putrid smell and the fatiguing Struggles."

The experience of nursing and being nursed was to become a recurrent theme in Coleridge's life and work. In the sickroom, he performed equally well horizontally and vertically. As a patient, he surrendered deliciously to what Charles Lamb called the "magnificent dream" of illness, whether he was being nursed as a child after his night on the riverbank or lying with his gouty leg propped up on Wordsworth's sofa while Mary and Sara Hutchinson stroked and tickled him. But whenever the tables were turned, he exhibited both sympathy and fortitude. When his brother-in-law Robert Lovell was dying of fever, he sat with him all night; when his young protégé Charles Lloyd had epileptic seizures, he gently restrained him; toward the end of his life, when his son Derwent had typhus, he hovered over his bed night and day, sponging his face and forcing him to drink water. On the twenty-third day of Derwent's fever, he recorded in his Notebook, by candlelight, that he had "Turned a poor (very large & beautiful) Moth out of the Window in a hard Shower of Rain to save it from the Flames!"

Derwent and the moth survived. Twenty-eight years earlier, so had the trooper with smallpox. Silas Tomkyn Comberbache was himself eventually saved by his brothers, who raised the money to bail him out of his regiment. He returned to Cambridge (late, because he went for a walk and missed the carriage), vowed to rise at six and abjure drunken parties, worked hard for a time, and dropped out.

None of us knows anyone even remotely like Samuel Taylor Coleridge. But all of us know someone very much like Silas Tomkyn Comberbache, the fellow who makes scads of promises he can't keep, ducks his responsibilities, owes money, moves through life in a frenzy of disorganization, and yet—because he is generous, because he has so much charm, because he is his own worst critic, because we can't help ourselves—commands and deserves our love.

The Comberbache side of Coleridge was clearly in charge when, as a young student at Christ's Hospital, he was walking through the Strand, oblivious to his surroundings, pretending to be Leander crossing the Hellespont. While making energetic swimming motions, he touched a stranger's coat and was accused of being a pickpocket. (But when the tearful boy explained that he was en route from Abydos to Sestos, the gentleman was so amazed by his eloquence that, instead of reporting him to the police, he gave him a free ticket to a circulating library.) The boy grew into a man who overslept, missed his deadlines, was afraid to open letters lest they contain bad news, and, according to Holmes, during a period when he was living alone, "started with six shirts, lost three in the laundry, found he had been sleeping in the fourth, and had inadvertently used the fifth as a floormat while washing." (But, wearing the sixth shirt, he gave a series of brilliant *ex tempore* lectures, the secret of whose success was their very lack of preparation.) He made plans for innumerable projects that were never realized: the Pantisocracy, a kibbutz-like commune on the Susquehanna River; a chemistry laboratory; a 1,400-page work of geography; a two-volume history of English prose; a monograph on poetry; a critique of Chaucer; a translation of *Faust*; a musical play about Adam and Eve; a history of logic; a history of German metaphysics; a treatise on witchcraft; an epic on the fall of Jerusalem; an encyclopedia. (But he wrote poems, plays, essays, reviews, letters, journals, lectures, sermons, pamphlets, translations, newspaper articles, position papers, and civil decrees: enough to make Virginia Woolf call him "not a man, but a swarm.")

In 1797, Coleridge arrived on foot to pay his first visit to Wordsworth, beginning a thirty-seven-year friendship broken by lovers' quarrels as tragic and passionate as if they had been romantic and not merely Romantic. Wordsworth recalled that as Coleridge approached

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the house, he "did not keep to the high road, but leaped over a gate and bounded down a pathless field by which he cut off an angle." Some years later, Hazlitt noted that both men liked to compose poetry while walking, but Coleridge preferred "uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copsewood; whereas Wordsworth always wrote (if he could) walking up and down a straight gravel-walk." Wordsworth did what was expected, and it was always correct and on time. According to Southey, Coleridge "does nothing that he ought to do, and everything which he ought not," and that is why his path was always more difficult and usually more interesting.

Even though Wordsworth expelled "Christabel" from the *Lyrical Ballads*, their collaborative collection, and demoted "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" from the front to the back of volume 1; even though he accused Coleridge of "a derangement in his intellectual and moral constitution"; even though, speaking from years of exhausted experience as host, he warned a mutual friend not to take Coleridge into his household, and thereby precipitated "a compressing and strangling Anguish" that brought Coleridge to the brink of suicide—still, no one can deny that each man bored irretrievably to the center of the other's heart. Coleridge had a habit of getting close to his male friends by falling in love with the women in their orbits. His first love, Mary Evans, was the sister of a Christ's Hospital chum; the woman he married, Sara Fricker, was the sister of women who married two fellow Pantisocrats. And the object of years of unconsummated extramarital fantasies ("my whole Being wrapt up in one Desire, all the Hopes & Fears, Joys & Sorrows, all the Powers, Vigour & Faculties of my Spirit abridged into one perpetual Inclination"), and of many beautiful poems, was Sara Hutchinson, the sister of the woman who married William Wordsworth. One cannot help thinking that much of Coleridge's emotional attachment to Wordsworth was channeled into his yearning for the woman he called "Asra," in order to distinguish her from the undesired Sara to whom he was married.

Poor Sara Fricker Coleridge! Coleridge had expected to live with her in America, demonstrating the perfectability of Man in the great communal Pantisocracy. Instead, they shared an isolated cottage near Bristol and rapidly discovered that they had nothing in common. Sara was an honorable woman, a good mother, far from stupid, and beautiful in her youth; but she cared little for literature and was repelled by Coleridge's wild vagaries of mood. In 1798, after three years of marriage, Coleridge escaped her by traveling with Wordsworth to Germany, where he planned to stay three months and stayed ten. In 1806, upon his return from two and half years in Malta and Italy, he dragged his feet miserably in London because, as Wordsworth observed, "he dare not go home, he recoils so much from the thought of domesticating with Mrs Coleridge." Coleridge lived apart from his wife for the rest of his life and rarely saw his children. In one of the most sweeping rants ever uttered by a disappointed husband, he blamed his marriage's "endless *heart-wasting*" for his "irresolution, procrastination, [and] languor," as well as for his opium addiction and the loss of his poetic muse.

"No one on earth has ever LOVED me," he later wrote. I am sure that thousands of his readers, especially young women, have come upon that sentence and mentally piped up, "I have!" No attractive runaway—the more vulnerable, the better—will ever be in want of rescuers of a certain type. When I was in college, I was among the multitudes who wanted to sit at Coleridge's feet while he recited "The Eolian Harp," soothe his fevered brow, discuss metaphysics (even though I didn't know what they were), and create a domestic paradise from which he would never wish to flee. Didn't I think Asra might pose a bit of a threat? Not at all; Coleridge's daughter had called her "dumpy." I have recently been corresponding with the critic Evelyn Toynton about our favorite scapegrace, and was not surprised when she wrote me: "I developed my crush on him in my first year of college and decided that, if only he had been married to me instead of his unsympathetic wife, all his genius would have been realized." Back then, Evelyn kept a framed portrait of Coleridge at her bedside. It has since been retired, but her computer screensaver consists of three red words that scroll endlessly across a black background: "Silas Tomkyn Comberbache."

I asked Evelyn what she thought Coleridge was running away from, "beyond the obvious:

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unhappy marriage, adult responsibilities, money problems, broken friendships, physical pain, unrealized ambitions, England's imaginative constraints." She responded, "Could one say he was escaping from pain and self-loathing and the pain of self-loathing? Yet it seems to me that his escapism was extraordinary in that it was fueled (at least sometimes) by such a tremendous sense of what he was fleeing *toward*—feelings of transcendence, a state of oneness with the deity, a non-material reality far finer than the gross corporeality of the body. That's why there is always something reductive about those studies of S.T.C. that present him as, in effect, a typical junkie. Maybe, like every junkie, he just wanted to get high, but what got him high was of a higher order than with any other junkie one can think of."

The junkie label is from the opium, of course—and from "Kubla Khan," which, because it was composed under the influence, I once used as ammunition in an adolescent debate with my parents over the benefits of hallucinogenic drugs. It would be quite possible to romanticize Coleridge's altered states if you read only the first three or four hundred of Holmes's 1,031 pages. He savors the "beauteous spectra of two colours, orange and violet" in his laudanum tumbler; when he writes a friend, "Do bring down some of the Hyoscyamine Pills & I will give a fair Trial of opium, Hensbane, & Nepenthe," he sounds as cheery as Timothy Leary inviting Richard Alpert over for a few tabs of acid with a chaser of psilocybin. But in volume two, opium becomes the stuff of the very nightmares that he hoped it would suppress, "an indefinite indescribable Terror as with a scourge of ever restless, ever coiling and uncoiling Serpents." This is not the kind of escape I had in mind at sixteen. Nor did I have in mind the blocked bowels—a side effect of opium addiction—that made him "weep & sweat & moan & scream."

Coleridge spent the last eighteen years of his life as a sort of detox inpatient in the home of James Gillman, a kindly physician who never entirely weaned him off laudanum but managed, by a combination of sympathy and guile, to control the doses. For the first time in his life, Coleridge felt no need to escape. He called Gillman and his wife "my most dear Friends," accompanied them on seaside vacations, and even, to show his gratitude, collaborated with Gillman on *An Essay on Scrofula.* During his years with the Gillmans he wrote a few good poems and some memorable prose. He also gave a well-attended last lecture, which he described in a mock advertisement as being delivered by "a rare Subject—rather fat indeed—but remarkable as a fine specimen of a broken Heart."

His heart had been broken, he told a friend, by "four griping and grasping Sorrows": his failed marriage, his quarrels with Wordsworth, his thwarted love for Asra, and the ruin of his son Hartley. The last of these sorrows colored Coleridge's last years with an agonizing sense of déjà vu, as if Silas Tomkyn Comberbache had been revived in a drama whose tragedy had been intensified and whose comedy had been entirely lost. Hartley was Coleridge's oldest and most brilliant child. Like his father, he was a prodigious scholar, a captivating talker, a daydreamer, and a drunk. In 1819, when Hartley was elected a Fellow at Oxford, Coleridge was beside himself with joy. In 1820, when he was dismissed for "sottishness, a love of low company, and . . . inattention to college rules," Coleridge was, in Mrs. Gillman's words, "convulsed with agony." Two years later, visiting London with his father, Hartley suddenly vanished into the crowd. Coleridge lived twelve more years, but the two runaways, one overwhelmed by his disgrace and the other overwhelmed by his loss, never saw each other again.

Hartley Coleridge is the "Dear babe, that sleepest cradled by my side" in "Frost at Midnight," the first Coleridge poem I ever read. At sixteen, I knew nothing of either man's life. I could not guess that Coleridge, the tender father who vowed to show his firstborn son the "lovely shapes and sounds intelligible" of the natural world, would flee his wife and children; I could not guess that the "babe so beautiful" would grow up to flee his father. Now I know that domestic happiness was just another of Coleridge's failed schemes. But biography can be false even when it is true. When I lose myself in the poem—the one form of escapism that never made its author feel guilty—the window of the little cottage, overhung with "silent icicles," still opens to a vista of infinite possibility.

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Time will bring to light whatever is hidden, and it will conceal and cover up what is now shining with the greatest splendor.

—HORACE,
Epistles, I, *c. 5 B.C. (trans. D. Grene)*

We are weighed down, every moment, by the conception and the sensation of Time. And there are but two means of escaping and forgetting this nightmare: pleasure and work. Pleasure consumes us. Work strengthens us. Let us choose.

—CHARLES BAUDELAIRE,
My Heart Laid Bare, *1865*

We speak of time in three ways or modes—the past, present and future. Every child is aware of them, but no wise man has ever penetrated their mystery. We become aware of them when we hear a voice telling us: you will also come to an end.

—PAUL TILLICH,
The Eternal Now, *1963*

I propose to define time as the social interpretation of reality with respect to the difference between past and future.

—NIKLAS LUHMANN,
The Future Cannot Begin, *1976*

Whenever I attempt to frame a simple idea of time, abstracted from the succession of ideas in my mind, which flows uniformly, and is participated [*sic*] by all beings, I am lost and embrangled in inextricable difficulties.

—GEORGE BERKELEY,
The Principles of Human Knowledge, *1710*

Since the New Year is a reactualization of the cosmogony, it implies starting time over again at its beginning, that is, restoration of the primordial time, the "pure" time, that existed at the moment of Creation. That is why the New Year is the occasion for "purifications," for the expulsion of sins, of demons, or merely of a scapegoat.

—MIRCEA ELIADE,
The Sacred and the Profane, *1957*

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Time

COLLECTED BY
ANDRÉ BERNARD

The *long run* is a misleading guide to current affairs. *In the long run we are all dead.* Economists set themselves too easy, too useless a task if in tempestuous seasons they can only tell us that when the storm is long past the ocean is flat again.

—JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES,
A Tract on Monetary Reform, *1923*

Long, unpunctuated hours pass for all creatures in the Arctic. No wild frenzy of feeding distinguishes the short summer. But for the sudden movements of charging wolves and bolting caribou, the gambols of musk ox calves, the scamper of an Arctic fox, the swoop of a jaeger, the Arctic is a long, unbroken bow of time. Twilight lingers. There are no summer thunderstorms with bolts of lightning. The ice floes, the caribou, the musk oxen, all drift. To lie on your back somewhere in the light-drowned tundra of an Ellesmere Island valley is to feel that the ice ages might have ended but a few days ago.

—BARRY LOPEZ,
Arctic Dreams, *1986*

Soldiers, consider that from the summit of these pyramids, forty centuries look down on you.

—NAPOLEON BONAPARTE,
Speech before the Battle of the Pyramids, 1798

In the whole length of time there is much to see that one would rather not see—and much to suffer likewise. I put the boundary of human life at seventy years. These seventy years have twenty-five thousand two hundred days, not counting the intercalary month; but if every other year be lengthened by a month so that the seasons come out right, these intercalary months in seventy years will be thirty-five, and the days for these months ten hundred and fifty. So that all the days of a man's life are twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty; of all those days not one brings to him anything exactly the same as another. So, Croesus, man is entirely what befalls him.

—HERODOTUS,
I, *c. 443 B.C.*

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I cannot dissemble that twelve ample octavos must have tried, and may have exhausted, the indulgence of the Public; that, in the repetition of similar attempts, a successful Author has much more to lose, than he can hope to gain; that, I am now descending into the vale of years; and that the most respectable of my countrymen, the men whom I aspire to imitate, have resigned the pen of history about the same period of their lives. Yet I consider that the annals of ancient and modern times may afford rich and interesting subjects; that I am still possessed of health and leisure; that by the practice of writing some skill and facility must be acquired; and that in the ardent pursuit of truth and knowledge I am not conscious of decay.

—EDWARD GIBBON,
Preface to the final volume of The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, *1788*

For new Nobility is but the Act of Power; but Ancient nobility is the Act of Time.

—FRANCIS BACON,
"Of Nobility," *1597*

Much of what we associate with or even know about such periods as "long ago" or "the beginning" or "at the end of time" is poetic—made up. For a historian of Middle Kingdom Egypt, "long ago" will have a very clear sort of meaning, but even this meaning does not totally dissipate the imaginative, quasi-fictional quality one senses lurking in a time very different and distant from our own. For there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away. This is no less true of the feelings we often have that we would have been more "at home" in the sixteenth century or in Tahiti.

—EDWARD SAID,
Orientalism, *1978*

The watch whose description I am reading (Patek Philippe calibre 89) is a pocket watch, a double case in eighteen-carat gold, endowed with thirty-three functions. . . . I would spend hours and hours knowing the day, the week, the month, the year, the decade, the century, the year's position in the leap-year cycle, hour, minute, and second of daylight saving time, hour, minute, and second in the time zone of my choice, temperature, sidereal time, moon phase, time of dawn and time of sunset, equation of time, position of the sun in the zodiac—not to mention the fun I would have shuddering at the infinity of the complete and mobile depiction of the stellar map, or pressing the stop button at the various dials of the chronograph and the tachymeter, or deciding when I should rest a moment and relax in the assurance of the built-in alarm. I was forgetting: a special indicator would show how much power remained. And still another thing: if I wanted, I could also know the exact time. But why should I?

—UMBERTO ECO,
How to Travel With a Salmon, *1992*

I like old people when they have aged well. And old houses with an accumulation of sweet honest living in them are good. And the timelessness that only the passing of Time itself can give to objects both inside and outside the spirit is a continuing reassurance.

—M.F.K. FISHER,
Sister Age, *1983*

Oh yes, I'd do it all again; the spirit is willing yet; I feel the same desire to do the work but the flesh is weak. It's too bad that our bodies wear out while our interests are just as strong as ever.

—SUSAN B. ANTHONY
on her deathbed, 1906

Think, also, of the ladies of the land weaving toilet cushions against the last day, not to betray too green an interest in their fate! As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU,
Walden ("Economy"), *1854*

Nothing puzzles me more than time and space; and yet nothing puzzles me less, for I never think about them.

—CHARLES LAMB,
letter to Thomas Manning, January 2, 1810

I've been in the twilight of my career longer than most people have had their career.

—MARTINA NAVRATILOVA,
September 30, 1993

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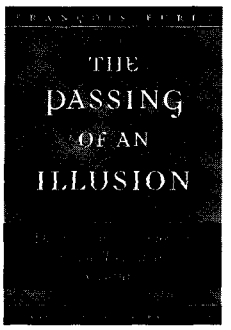

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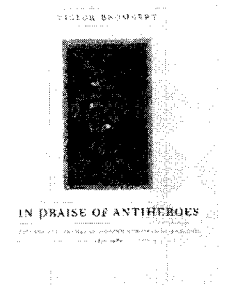

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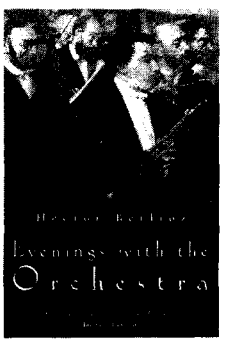

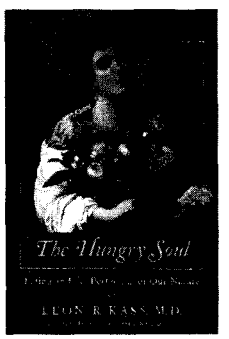

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The Siegen Affair

SIMON SCHAMA

Dear God, what had become of Jan? It had been three weeks since he had taken leave of the family. Maria knew it was no simple thing for her husband to see to the legal affairs of the Princess of Orange. Even a man as learned in the law as Jan Rubens might get lost in all those encumbrances and escheats. But he had never been away so long on the Princess's business. And were he detained by some unexpected matter, he would have let his wife know. Perhaps there had been letters? Perhaps they had been taken on the road? Perhaps *he* had been taken on the road? Lord knows the way to Siegen, two days' ride east of Cologne, was full of terrors: armies of beggars, some folk said; soldiers who had fled the regiment and lived in the woods, preying on travelers.

Maria brimmed with apprehension even as she tried to reassure the children. Her friends had asked questions in town, had written to fellow merchants in Siegen. She herself had written, many times, directly to the Princess, begging pardon for her presumption but imploring her to provide news of her husband's whereabouts and condition. Finally, and in desperation, she had sent two servants employed by a kinsman to see if anything could be discovered in Siegen. Much was suspected, nothing known for certain.

From her house on the Rinkenpfuhl, Maria could see the life of Cologne move through the street: knife grinders pushing their sharpening carts, onion women balancing baskets on their heads, vendors of white sand for the writing desk with sacks slung over their shoulders, all incomprehensibly indifferent to her foreboding. She prayed. She went through agonies of uncertainty. She moved among the *Burgerfraüen*, her starched

Simon Schama is University Professor at Columbia University. This essay is adapted from *Rembrandt's Eyes*, which Knopf is publishing this fall.

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Flemish cap conspicuous amidst the forehead plates and dangling pommels that made the local merchant women look like a swarm of busy insects. How long was she to be tried?

She was answered in the last week of March 1571. On the twenty-eighth, in the depths of the gray Lenten cold, a messenger arrived bearing a letter, not from Siegen but from the castle of the Count of Nassau at Dillenburg. Perhaps, for a moment, Maria was relieved to learn that her husband was alive. But the news that followed was a sword-thrust passing clear through her body. Jan Rubens had been arrested the same day he had departed for Siegen, virtually on crossing into the Count's territories. He was imprisoned in the castle, his life forfeit to William, Prince of Orange, the Count's brother, whose honor he had violated by committing adultery with the Princess. Did Maria swoon, cry out to God for succor, send the children from the house lest they see her tears of grief and shame? She most certainly prayed to the Savior, to the merciful Father, to the Dear Lady to give her the strength to endure this ordeal, to spare her sorry husband's life, if not for her sake, then for their children's.

Later that day, another man dismounted before Maria's brick-fronted house with a letter from Dillenburg, this time in her husband's hand. It more than confirmed her worst fears, and added to them the dreadful sense that she was being addressed from the tomb by a man confessing his sins before meeting his end. Jan admitted everything, begged his wife's forgiveness, declared himself base and unworthy of her. He had, he said, made a clean breast of everything before the Count. His position was especially black since the Princess, it seemed, was with child, yet had not seen her husband, Prince William, for over a year.

Now that he was shut up in Dillenburg Castle, Jan Rubens, erstwhile alderman and magistrate of the city of Antwerp, could see, with bitter clarity, that it had been a mistake to share the bed of the Princess of Orange. Of course it was common knowledge that she was awash with drink. When deep in her cups, she was even capable of cursing her husband's name, threatening first his life and then her own. Attempts had been made by the princely in-laws to deny her wine. But Anna of Saxony, as Rubens knew to his cost, was altogether undeniable: by sudden turns, brazen or petulant. None of this, he supposed, could be extenuation for his offense. It was not for the criminal to pass judgment. Yet when asked bluntly by the Prince's brother which of them had been the more forward in this unhappy matter, Rubens replied, in his considered, lawyerly way, that "had he not been sure of his reception, he should never have dared to make an approach."

Though Jan could hardly mention this, it was much put about in the country that he had not been the first such transgressor. There had been

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tavern talk in Cologne concerning a captain and the son of a local money changer who had, in their respective fashions, offered the Princess their services and been well received. Who knew their fate? His own, alas, was all too plainly set out in German law and custom. Even had he not been so imprudent as to cuckold the preeminent nobleman of the Netherlands, Rubens would still have had to pay a capital price for his adultery. He could only hope to be granted the sword, as befitted his station as a learned doctor of the laws, and not be given to the hangman like a common cutpurse. In his capacity as alderman, he had sent such men to their death himself, heard the creaking gibbet, observed the impatient rooks wheeling overhead.

When Rubens could bring himself to reflect on the consequences of his sinful trespass, it must have cut him to the quick to think of his four lambkins, left fatherless, stained with disgrace and sunk into destitution. His own father, Bartholomeus the apothecary, had died when Jan was still a child, scarcely breeched. They had lived in Antwerp, the City of the Blessed Virgin, in the Apelstraat, at the sign of the Old Star, an address that proclaimed them solid citizens. The front rooms of the Rubens house had been filled with the stuff of the druggist's trade, a *microcosmos* packed into bowls and glass bottles and stoppered jars: emollients and purgatives, unguents and potions, syrups and tinctures; gentian, buckthorn, rhubarb, and wild horseradish; preparations of crayfish eye, toad oil, and spermaceti; live snails; ground staghorn; cinnabar, powdered coral, lead white, cream of tartar, aloes, poppy, ginger, hollyhock, and chicory. Yet none of this, in single doses or in any known combination, had been able to stay Bartholomeus Rubens's untimely death at forty, the very age at which his son Jan had himself now fallen into wretchedness.

Whatever the source of Rubens's misfortunes, though, they could not be blamed on a grievous childhood. After his father's death, Jan's mother, mindful of her children and herself, had married again, wisely accepting a provisions merchant from one of the weightiest families of the weightiest city in the world: great, gabled, cargo-congested Antwerp, *mercatorum mundi*, the fast-beating heart of the empire of Charles V that stretched from Prague to Peru. In his twenty-first year, Jan was sent off to Italy with instructions to drink deeply at the *fons sapientiae*. Seven years later, he returned to Antwerp, glorified by parchment bearing the august seals of the Sapienza College of Rome and attesting to his rank as doctor of both canon and civil laws.

Jan Rubens was now fit for the patricians, and they lost no time in making him one of their own. In October 1562, barely a year after his return to Flanders, Rubens was elected to the bench of Antwerp's eighteen aldermen: the *schepenen*. He would be reelected every year until the time of his sorrows. At age thirty-one he had become a notable of the city, admitted to share their salt and their gossip. Now he would sup at the

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long tables of the truly monied; listen philanthropically (but firmly) to the importunate poor; march, gaudily arrayed with his brother *schepenen*, in the great city festival of the Pentecost, while silver Flemish trumpets and droning bagpipes sounded the way. On judgment days he would don his black gown, sit with his colleagues on the benches of the capital tribunal, and, wearing a grave face, dispatch rogues and ruffians to the gallows.

The city of Antwerp was in its great glory, its face bright and rosy with limestone and brick, its inner rooms creamily marbled, the better to show off dark escritoires and cabinets wrought from nut woods and ebony, inlaid with ivory and tortoiseshell and pearl. At its heart, a great new Town Hall was rising, a palace really, utterly unlike anything to be seen north of Venice: a four-storied triumphal statement, rusticated below, balustraded above, Ionic pilasters, all the Renaissance trimmings. Rubens must have been present at its inauguration in 1565, and from the surmounting *tempietto* that rose cockily above its pitched roof he could survey the swarming metropolis with satisfaction, as the carillons pealed canons of godly self-congratulation.

Rubens stood among the masters of this fairest of places. In 1561 he had made a fine match: Maria, the daughter of Hendrick Pypelincx (a dealer in fine tapestries), demure, devout, and gratifyingly dowered. Standing before the altar of the St. Jacobskerk with his bride, Rubens must have supposed his life replete with blessings.

How could Jan Rubens know that in that year of his early splendor, 1561, another marriage was solemnized that would bring woe to him, as well as to its unfortunate partners? In distant Leipzig, William of Orange, the twenty-eight-year-old widower Prince, exceptionally rich and correspondingly indebted, arrived with a retinue of eleven hundred knights, squires, pages, heralds, drummers, and the usual complement of wrestlers, fools, dwarves, and dancers, to marry Anna of Saxony. In the *altdeutsch* fashion, the pair were wedded and publicly bedded amidst midsummer rose petals, country airs, and encouraging eructations. The bride was sixteen: high-spirited and high-colored, her flaxen hair wound up in tight rolls beneath her bridal tiara to form the curving lobes of a playing-card heart. Anna's high brow, large (and slightly fishy) eyes, irregular nose, and doughy white cheeks had all been inherited from her late father, the pig-sticking, foulmouthed, implacable Maurice, Elector of Saxony, Germany's most obstinate Lutheran Prince and the nemesis of the Catholic Habsburgs.

From this ebullient paternity, as well as from the disconcertingly eager manner in which Anna had responded to his formulaic letters of gallantry (three love letters in a single day!), William might have guessed that their union might want serenity. But for all his courtliness, the Prince

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was urgently sensual as well as needily uxorious. He had suffered acutely when his first wife died three years earlier. He had taken mistresses, one of whom had given him a son. But dynastic obligations demanded he join the Renaissance widowers' hunt, roaming through the courts of Europe to find a noblewoman endowed with the qualities needed to convert lust into posterity. There was no shortage of candidates, since aside from his own considerable fortune, William was also the legatee of his dead wife's handsome properties. After carefully weighing the pros and cons of the match, the Prince chose Anna of Saxony. She was presented to him, briefly, and from the little that could be glimpsed, he quite liked what he saw. Anna seemed, perhaps, a little overexcited, but after all, she was scarcely more than a child. There was every reason to assume that her occasionally agitated manner would eventually be curbed by the supply of wise counsel, the consciousness of high station, and the maturity of motherhood. For the time being, William declared in a famously unguarded moment at the wedding, Anna should put aside her Bible for chivalric romances like *Amadis of Gaul.*

There were some ill omens. During the relentless jousts accompanying the wedding festivities, the bride's uncle fell from his horse in full armor, thudded to the dirt, and fractured an arm. And William had barely got his bride to his palace in the Netherlands before general muttering broke out in the courts of Europe. There were those who believed the match to be a betrayal of Lutheranism and those who believed it a betrayal of Catholicism. Complicated negotiations were begun regarding the confessional practices of the new Princess. King Philip II of Spain insisted on Anna's speedy and unequivocal submission to Rome. The bride's grandfather, Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, issued countercommands to the effect that she be allowed full liberty to profess her Lutheran faith. William shut his ears to both demands, preferring a more supple arrangement. Anna was to conform in outward things to the Catholic Church but be permitted freedom of worship in her own chapel: public priests, private pastors. It was an intelligent solution in shockingly unintelligent times, and it pleased no one beyond the immediate circle of the Prince.

At midcentury, Christendom was ostensibly divided between Catholics and Protestants. But an even deeper cleavage divided militants from pragmatists. The latter would let men alone with their consciences, provided their observances did not disturb peace and propriety; the former detested such politic accommodations as courtesies to Satan. By necessity and by moral inclination, William was a pragmatist—a *politique,* in the sixteenth-century term.

William had been born into the Lutheran family of the German Counts of Nassau. But when an accident of inheritance turned him into one of the richest nobles in Europe, with great estates in the Netherlands,

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he took his proper place among the Catholic nobility at the court of the sovereign overlord of the country, the Habsburg Emperor Charles V. When he later led a revolt against the Habsburgs, it was not out of any sense of burning religious conviction, nor even out of incipient national feeling for the Dutch "homeland." It was rather that William saw himself as the defender of local rights and liberties in the seventeen provinces of the Netherlands against the bureaucratic intervention of a central royal government. Under Charles V—French-speaking, cosmopolitan, peripatetic—it had been possible, just, to think of that government as part of the world of the Netherlands itself. But when Charles's son, Philip II, succeeded to the sovereignty of the provinces by virtue of being King of Spain, the intrusion suddenly seemed much more aggressively foreign.

William's loyalties were necessarily divided. As the premier noble of the Netherlands, he was thought of as the natural representative of its people's grievances. His great rank had carried him to the office of Stadholder, or Governor, of the provinces of Holland, Zeeland, and Utrecht; he answered to the assembled representatives of the provinces—the Estates. But in that role he was also supposed to administer and enforce the law of the King. Should Estates and King ever fall into serious conflict, he would be put in a difficult if not impossible position. To survive, William of Orange would have to become, as he was forever known, "William the Silent"—not because he was taciturn but because he prudently kept his own counsel.

The conflict duly happened. At first it was a matter of taxes and bishops. Then, as Philip II resolved to root out the Protestant heresy from its hotbeds in the rich, literate cities of the Netherlands, it became inevitably a war of religion. Unlike his impetuous younger brother Louis, William was no Protestant. But he saw Philip's determination to demonize Protestantism as the makings of a political disaster, a civil war in the offing. His own hope was for a policy of toleration that would allow at least private freedom of worship, while the established Church remained loyal to Rome. But the middle years of the sixteenth century were not a time of compromise. They were a time of burnings and rantings. Recovered from the first shock of Reformation iconoclasm, the Catholic Church had caught a second wind, and was now fully committed to a crusade for orthodoxy. If necessary, that orthodoxy would be imposed on the Netherlands on the ends of Spanish pikes.

By 1566, Habsburg authority in the Netherlands was falling apart, and neither William nor, for that matter, Jan Rubens greeted the chaos with any joy. Like the Prince, Rubens had been sworn to uphold the King's law, yet he too had come to think of the Spanish Inquisition as an abuse of that law rather than its legitimate expression. Nor could he be entirely unmoved by the Calvinist fervor that gripped Antwerp. Psalmbooks—suddenly a seditious form of literature—were everywhere. Calvinist

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preachers attracted crowds to their sermons, thundering against the relics and rituals of the Roman Church as dross and trash, stinking abominations in the nostrils of the Lord. How was a conscientious magistrate to keep the peace? Thus went the fretful conversation when the *schepenen* met in the Town Hall. Should they outlaw Calvinism altogether, as a pernicious heresy and a danger to the commonwealth? Or should they permit its practice so long as there was no hurt to person or property? Which was the greater risk; which was the safer way?

In all likelihood, Jan Rubens shared the equivocations and uncertainties of many of his countrymen, observing Catholic forms while flirting with the heresies he was appointed to repress. In 1550, he had made a will that commended his soul to "Almighty God, to Mary his Blessed Mother and to all the Company of Heaven" and his "dead body to consecrated ground." In 1563, when he revised that will to take account of his marriage, references to the Virgin had vanished in favor of the simple commendation to God. As for the bodies of husband and wife, they were to be laid, simply, "in a place to be determined." The banality of the language announces a momentous withdrawal from devotional ritual: the name of the Virgin replaced by a legal formula, the hallowed ground by a civically authorized plot. This was a sure sign that Rubens had begun to reject Catholicism and to embrace instead the Protestant belief in salvation by faith alone.

By Pentecost, 1566, the sound of massed Calvinist voices extolling the Lord and damning the Pope had become a fervent chorus. Outside Antwerp's city walls, beyond the reach of its magistrates, the crowds listening to the "hedge-preachers" denounce the Roman Antichrist had swollen from hundreds to fifteen, sometimes twenty, thousand. More ominous, for the custodians of order, these congregations had begun to take on the look of an encampment. Food was cooked on open fires. And when the sermons and psalm-chanting refused to stop for darkness, families said their evening prayers beneath the summer sky and slept upon the trodden, muddy grass. Immediately below the improvised wooden pulpit, and all about the perimeter of the congregation, stood armed men equipped with harquebuses and crossbows, like the soldiers of Gideon's army. Behind this protective shield, the preachers fulminated against the idols and the effigies that were doing Satan's work of arousing the senses, and called for a great cleansing. For the moment, however, the violence remained rhetorical. The "hedge-flocks" were quiet and orderly, with well-to-do merchants and gentlemen reassuringly interspersed with stevedores, printers, weavers, goldsmiths, and tanners.

Beyond Antwerp, especially in Holland and the northern Netherlands, matters had become rougher, not least because the more zealous members of the Protestant nobility had themselves become patrons of iconoclasm, the destruction of ecclesiastical images. With each unopposed at-

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tack on a Catholic church, William's *via media* became more difficult to sustain. By mid-August, the Prince believed Antwerp to be on the point of tumult. He told the Regent as much when she summoned him to appear at a specially convened assembly of the Golden Fleece, the chivalric order of the Netherlands nobility, sworn to allegiance to King and Emperor. If he left Antwerp now, William warned, he could not answer for its peace. Nonsense, the Regent replied. The city is quiet. Come; you are needed to dissuade your fellow knights from the evil way of rebellion. Do not delay.

William obeyed. The day after he left Antwerp, an immense crowd, full-throated, singing the praises of God, assembled after vespers before the doors of the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk, the Cathedral of Our Dear Lady, the greatest and grandest of all parish churches. The people were equipped with mallets, shears, knives, and hammers, all taken from their workshops. Some from the docks and shipyards had brought grappling hooks, lanyards, and ropes, as if they were about to board an enemy vessel. Alarmed at the size of the gathering, Rubens and his fellow *schepenen* decided to call out the civic guard, but their numbers had been weakened by defections to the iconoclasts. Nervous attempts to disarm the most aggressive among the crowd rapidly turned into scuffles. After the crowd forced its way past the barred and bolted gates and marched down the nave, a Calvinist preacher named Herman Moded entered the pulpit and urged his flock to scour the temple of the idols and puppets that Satan had set within its precincts. Smite the abominations, he commanded; lay them low; pierce the Whore of Babylon to the heart. Praise be to God.

So the flock did as it was bidden and began indeed to smite. And because it was not fellow citizens who were on the receiving end of the hitting but dumb pieces of wood and stone and cloth and glass, the assaults could be joyfully unconstrained. Everything that had made Christian Flanders bewitchingly beautiful was for that very reason marked for obliteration. Had not Calvin himself insisted that since God's majesty was invisible, anything that presumed to represent his works, or that of Christ and the apostles, was idle blasphemy? Accordingly, the infantry of the Pristine Word dragged the wood-and-plaster Madonnas from their enclosures and smashed them to pieces on the church pavement. They shredded the jeweled vestments with tailors' shears. Nothing happened. No sudden curse befell the breakers; none fell paralyzed with retribution. Well, then, God must indeed be smiling because His Commandments were being so zealously executed.

Even before the Cathedral of Our Dear Lady had been reduced to its proper, chastened emptiness, the iconoclasts had fanned out into the city, making for the thirty churches and countless convents and monasteries that had been Antwerp's glory. Porches were filled with the debris of shattered statues—legs, arms, trunks—waiting like dismembered plague

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victims for the death carts to carry them away. Monastic libraries were set ablaze. Children skipped along the cobblestones, trying to catch the airborne fragments of scorched missals and chant books.

From their different places, William of Orange and Jan Rubens surveyed the disaster. Of the two, it was probably Rubens who had been more active among Calvinist circles (or so the Inquisition was to claim). But whatever the state of their shifting creeds, both must have understood that the *beeldenstorm*—the storm of images—had made moderation simultaneously essential and improbable. Shocked by the ferocity of the onslaught on the old church, and nervous of retribution coming from Spain, cooler heads on both sides of the confessional divide attempted to return the country to reason. On August 23, 1566, a formal ban on ransacking churches was proclaimed, and the following day, the Regent announced an accord embodying William's frail hopes of confessional coexistence. Protestants would be permitted their own places of worship, provided they returned the occupied churches to the Catholics. This partition approach had already been attempted in the regions of France where Protestantism was strongest, but with the dispiriting result of turning local hostilities into all-out religious war.

William's worries grew, and with good reason. King Philip had little interest in an accord; he planned to crush the Protestant uprising with military force. William was also losing the struggle to restrain the Protestant zealots. Early in 1567, he privately abandoned the attempt at compromise and steeled himself for the coming conflict. Anna and their younger daughter were sent, in secret, from the Netherlands to the castle of Dillenburg in Nassau, his birthplace, together with whatever money could be gotten from pawning plate and jewels. On April 10, William formally resigned from the Council of State, and by the first week of May he had joined his family in Dillenburg with a company of a hundred and fifty men, living off the hospitality of his younger brother Johan, who had succeeded his father as Count of Nassau. Anna, heavily pregnant, was not especially welcoming. She was suffering cruelly beneath the weight of so many Nassaus: sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, an especially vigilant and forbidding mother-in-law. What was she to do? Whom was she to see? Where were her people to be accommodated? How could she be entertained? How could she possibly be expected to endure such a place?

For Prince William, now reduced to the status of a fugitive, Dillenburg was a blessed asylum. For all he had gone through, the Prince was still undecided on whether to join a rebellion, the very idea of which was repugnant to his ingrained instinct for peace and order. The Duke of Alva, who entered Brussels by the King's order on August 22, 1567, swiftly decided this for him. Indictments of treason were issued against all the leaders who were deemed insufficiently loyal to Philip, without nice dis-

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tinctions between militants and moderates. The entirety of the Prince's possessions, estates, and property was declared forfeit to the crown. Nine bargeloads of furniture, tapestries, and paintings were hauled away by canal from William's palace at Breda and stored at Ghent for the King's pleasure. Yet even now, when there could be no possible turning back, William's printed *Justification*, the first great propaganda document of the revolt of the Netherlands, insisted that the King had been led astray by evil advice and expressed the fervent hope that more enlightened counsels might yet prevail in Madrid.

After gathering a small army and making a few desultory attempts at resistance, William was soon reduced to trudging between Strasbourg, Duisburg, and Cologne, imploring the German and French princes to provide the men and the money that would allow him to challenge Alva's disciplined and well-supplied forces. "We may regard the Prince of Orange," Alva wrote cheerfully, "as a dead man." Few disagreed.

After Margaret of Parma resigned the regency, Alva established his principal instrument of terror, the *Conseil des Troubles* (known to its victims as the Council of Blood), a corps of one hundred and ninety prosecutors, together with the usual complement of interrogators, jailers, torturers, and executioners. There were big targets and small. Most of those caught in the net of Alva's terror were from the mercantile and trading classes, but the Duke understood perfectly the demonstrative effect of selectively victimizing the elite. The loftier the noble, the more shocking the attack. Altogether, about a thousand people were killed. The fortunate were executed forthwith on the scaffold. Common citizens who had been convicted of assaults on the churches were subject to breaking on the wheel or live quartering before being burned at the stake. If they were found guilty of blasphemy of the Word, their tongues were pierced with hot needles before they were taken to the gallows.

As an alderman who had apparently stood by while the city was surrendered to sacrilegious riot, Jan Rubens was a natural target for Alva's police. In October 1568, Rubens was summoned to appear in person at Antwerp's Town Hall to answer charges of heresy and sedition. He could not have been optimistic about his chances of survival. The most popular of the city's burgomasters had been publicly decapitated the previous month on similar charges and with no more damning evidence. Rubens's identification by a Catholic friar as "the first alderman of the city and the most learned of its Calvinists" was unhelpful, for erudition was no mitigation of heresy; better, indeed, to be thought of as credulous. Answering the probing questions posed by the Council of Blood's zealous interrogator, Rubens tried to make the best of it. He had listened to perhaps four or five sermons, he conceded, but had never attended the Reformers' assemblies or communions. What he had done was from

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curiosity, not wickedness; indeed, he protested, he was now, as always, a loyal son of the Catholic Church and an obedient servant of the King.

He also knew this would cut no ice with the Duke or his prosecutors. Preceded by his wife and four young children, he therefore fled Antwerp for Cologne, where there was a large colony of fugitives from Alva's repression. Cologne was still very much a Catholic city, but its pragmatically minded authorities saw commercial opportunities in the influx of Dutch and Flemish refugees (along with their bullion). The Protestants were admitted on sufferance, and even allowed private places of worship, provided the public peace was not disturbed by their presence. Rubens, however, had been identified to the city authorities as just such a potential troublemaker, someone "who does not go to church." In May 1569, these suspicions resulted in a peremptory order to leave the city within eight days. Rubens now played his best and only card. Two letters recited his respectable history and confirmed that he had come to Cologne to practice his profession as an advocate. A further detail was meant to repel any attempts at eviction. He was, he stated, in the employ of Her Serene Highness the Princess of Orange, who, on occasion when traveling, had even entrusted him with the custody of her children.

Had the city fathers made careful inquiries, they might have discovered that Her Serene Highness was in the habit of entrusting virtually anyone with the care of her children. But Rubens's self-advertisement was grandiose enough for its purpose. The family was allowed to stay. Also, his claim was true.

On arriving in Cologne, Rubens had sought out an old colleague from Antwerp, Jan Bets, a legal counselor to Prince William. In 1569, Bets was especially occupied with the status of Princess Anna's dowry, trying to build a case for its exemption from the general forfeiture that had befallen the estate of her husband. And although Anna was forever pleading poverty and blaming William for her own predicament, Bets's mission was not necessarily an act of disloyalty. Under Netherlandish law, wives retained a title to the dowry even when it was enjoyed in common through the life of the marriage. Given William's desperate straits, it made sense to exploit the legal distinction to rescue Anna's portion from the wreckage. At the very least, he must have calculated, the provision of funds might muffle the shrillness of her recriminations. Bets's charge was to try to enlist influential and sympathetic figures—the Emperor Maximilian, the Landgrave of Hesse, the Prince Palatine—to voice their support for her claims, in the hope of persuading King Philip.

It could not have been easy working for Anna. This being the case, Bets may well have found it convenient, as well as necessary, to spend much of his time away from Cologne, traveling among the princely courts in Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Vienna. And it was this diplomatic absenteeism that opened an opportunity for his friend Rubens to take care of the

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Princess's domestic and legal affairs in his absence. Introduced to Anna, he found immediate favor.

Just when it was that counseling turned to caresses will never be known. From the distance of the centuries, Jan and Anna make an improbable couple—the sober Flemish advocate, excessively given to quoting the classics, and the wine-soaked Princess bursting from her whalebone. But beneath Jan's trim beard and prim demeanor, there may well have been a strong animal nature. Whether it was Anna's jeweled hand that paused, so gratefully, a moment too long on Jan's starched cuff, or his eyes that traveled nervously over her throat and bosom, the sheer recklessness of their act bespeaks a consuming infatuation, the kind that maddens its partners into illusions of invisibility.

Could it be that the unfortunate Anna of Saxony was actually . . . desirable? If you listened to the historians, you would never think so. She has been variously described as a screaming shrew, without beauty, charm, or sense, and afflicted with curvature of the spine; as a hoyden in a hard corset; as a foul-smelling drunk with an itch in her linen. Anna occupies a place in the pantheon of Renaissance female infamy somewhere between Mary Stuart and Catherine de Medici, but bereft of the charisma of the one or the intelligence of the other.

Ever since the revolt of the Netherlands was celebrated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—especially by Americans like John Adams and John Lothrop Motley—as the founding epic of liberal freedom, William the Silent, Anna's cuckolded husband, has necessarily been its dauntless hero: *pater patriae,* the father of his country. In this long view, the burden William carried on his shoulders in the dark years between his flight from his palace in Brabant and his first stunning military success in 1572—a crucial step toward the independence of the Netherlands from Spanish rule—was not merely that of his country, but that of the fate of Western liberal democracy. Those that made his burden still heavier, then, become traitors, not merely to the cause of the Prince, but to the cause of the West. Alas for Anna, who had no inkling that her feckless self-indulgence was imperiling the fate of democracy! Woe to Anna, whose very name made Dr. Bakhuizen van den Brink, the upstanding Dutch archivist who discovered her sorry history in the 1850s, shudder with disgust and avert his eyes from the squalid details!

The truth is that we know very little about Anna of Saxony other than the relentlessly repeated opinion that, from the beginning, she was a handful. We do know that she transformed rapidly from an adolescent writing letters of unseemly ardor to her betrothed into a mother of a series of children who, as so often was the case in the sixteenth century, hurried from the crib to the casket. There were exceptions—two daughters, Anna and Emilie, and a son, Maurice, also sickly and given little

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chance of survival. Survive he did, though, to lead the Dutch with courage, intelligence, and discipline. His virtues, say the historians, must have descended to him exclusively through his father's line, miraculously unadulterated by his mother's vices.

At some point, certainly, the marriage of William and Anna became a pathetic misery. Private wrongs, imagined or real, were turned by the Princess into public tantrums. Even before William's difficulties accumulated, Anna was given to accusing him of taking counsel from those who made no secret of their dislike for her. She became restive, hysterical, a little paranoid. Her husband, she was only too aware, was himself no saint of marital fidelity, so a gracefully executed bow or an airy jest, directed at one of the women of the court, seemed to her overwrought imagination a calculated seduction. Like many other young women destined to be dynastic broodmares, caught between dowager ladies-in-waiting and husbands wrapped up in politics, Anna struck out on her own. At the hunting parties or jousts she attended, there was no shortage of courtiers eager to compare her in song and rhyme to Venus, Diana, Cybele, Isis.

Why should a goddess have to live like a vagabond? Baffled by the collapse of William's power and fortune, Anna thrashed about looking for someone to blame. Before their marriage her husband had promised her amusement and grandeur, but instead he had brought her a cargo of sorrows. The complete courtier had turned, before her eyes, into a haggard melancholic, his head filled with incomprehensible stratagems, all of which seemed to deepen their troubles. Obtuse to these high matters of state, Anna registered their significance only through the hurts she received on their account: an elaborate snub from the Regent, the condescension of the Flemish noblewomen to her clumsy French and booming *Hochdeutsch.* Increasingly, she kept her own company for hunting and hawking, and kept it at a remove from her husband, of whose courtliness to others she became possessively and peevishly jealous. Even before William became a hunted man, his great estate ruined, robbed, or pawned, Anna had determined that she would not be dragged down in his train.

Dillenburg was a penance, her pregnancy an ordeal, the infant a howling inconvenience. Sick of the Nassaus, Anna heartily wished to be rid of them all. Letters arrived from the Prince imploring her to be patient, to stay with the family. She ignored them, except occasionally to write back complaining bitterly of her treatment at the hands of William's impossible relatives. Late in 1568, Anna bolted for Cologne with a company of noisy hangers-on.

William was uneasy about Anna's liberty, and with good reason. Should she run true to form, his military and political embarrassments could only be compounded by his wife's notoriety. And scarcely any time elapsed after her arrival at Cologne before he began to be the object of

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ostentatious and unwanted commiseration, the mask of concern failing to hide the inward smirk. The Prince's response to daily reports of scandalous misconduct and extravagant expenses was a series of letters to his *liebe Hausfrau,* attempting to point out her wifely obligations. Initially he hoped she could be persuaded to join him on his wanderings through France and Germany. But when she bothered to reply at all, Anna flatly rejected any thought of embracing such inconveniences. On one notorious occasion she was said to have greeted the arrival of a letter from William by publicly tearing it to shreds in front of the messenger and her assembled company, shrieking with laughter at the mention of his name.

Sorely tried, and at the lowest ebb in his fortunes, William attempted tenderness. In a touching letter written in November 1569, he gently reminded his wife:

> You have promised before God and the Church to abandon the things of this world to follow your husband, whom, it seems to me, you should hold closer to your heart than trivial and frivolous things. . . . I do not say this to try and persuade you to come here, for if this is contrary to your own wish, the remedy must be with you, but to remind you that I am tied to you by the commandment of God as well as by friendly affection. There is nothing in the world that gives more consolation to a man than to be comforted by his wife and to see with what patience she demonstrates her willingness to bear the cross that the Almighty places upon her husband, especially when it is for things that will advance the glory of God and the liberty of his country. . . . To see [my wife] for but a few days, it seems to me that I should be happy to suffer all the miseries that God has sent me.

When husband and wife did finally meet, between William's journeyings, recrimination was followed by tearful reconciliation. But as soon as William disappeared, so did Anna's intermittent fits of loyalty. At the beginning of 1570, the Prince was addressing his neglected letters to "my wife, my own," but by the spring, with more reports from Cologne of her wild flirtations and public abuse of his own name, he had despaired of repairing the marriage. William was now more concerned with containing the damage its notoriety could inflict on his already battered standing in the courts of Europe. He had wanted to be happy. Now he hoped only not to be ridiculous. He wrote to Anna's grandfather, the Elector of Hesse, begging him to admonish his granddaughter to mend her ways:

> The bad reputation my wife is acquiring redounds not only on her, but on me, on her children and all her relatives. . . . For to tell the truth, it is no longer possible for me to be patient as I have been up to now, . . . so many adversities, one coming after the other, may make a man lose sense and patience and respect; and in truth, instead of the consolation I

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> should have from her, she must utter a hundred thousand insults . . . follies and outrageous nonsense.

This, he continued, was all the more wounding since "I can swear to you, on the damnation of my soul that for a long time I have wished that we could live together as God has commanded us."

Anna, however, was no longer paying much attention to God. There was someone else on her mind. By St. John's Eve, 1570—the long night, so the village lore prescribed, when women were free to choose partners and men were bound to comply—Anna had chosen Jan Rubens. He had evidently become indispensable to her as counselor and helpmate. She had taken a grandiose house in Cologne, where Rubens went through her correspondence from Bets and explained its implications for the fate of her estate. Perhaps, while he did so, he took care to lavish flattery on a woman who drank it up as eagerly as Rhine wine. Perhaps his own head was turned by the exalted quality of his patroness. The doctor of laws, after all, was still the son and stepson of grocers and druggists. At some point, loosened by wine, their talk must have moved beyond encumbrances and escheats. Rubens was asked to supper.

Her husband's work with the Princess took up a great deal of time, but Maria was in no mind to complain. They had, after all, been close to being turfed out of the city when, from God's bounty, her husband found a place that enabled them to survive in this German exile. And how should she begrudge service to the Princess when Prince William himself was in such need? Besides, many others were not so blessed. They could make do with the manservant, Martin, and the cook. The children had food, and they were safe from harm. It was a little hard, of course, when, in the autumn, the Princess removed herself to her country lodge in the woods near Siegen, fifty leagues and more from Cologne, and Jan was obliged to attend on her there, sometimes for days at a time. But with the winter closing in, the roads filling with ice and vagabonds, it was certainly better that he be spared the perils of frequent travel. As for the stories that Martin brought back from the Alte Markt about the Princess, they were fishwife slander, the shoddy rags of the idle and the wicked. Maria paid them no heed until Jan left for Siegen and was imprisoned for adultery in the castle of Dillenburg.

Sitting miserably in his cell, Jan knew he could expect no mercy from the Prince's family. But from his wife he may have assumed some understanding, since amidst their professions of abject contrition, Jan's letters home provided careful instructions on how best to conceal the scandal from the émigré community of Cologne, from their friends, from their relatives, from his business associates. He was, as ever, simultaneously culprit and lawyer. But as little as he deserved his wife's forgive-

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ness, Jan was right to suppose that she would offer it. Even before she read his first letter, Maria had decided to pardon him, to do everything in her power to ensure their family's survival, and had written to him in a forgiving vein.

Four days later she wrote again:

> Dear and most beloved husband,
>
> I received your letter of the 1st of April and I see that you have a great desire to hear my news, as I was sure you would have, which is why, on that same day, the 28th, when you wrote to me, I sent you a long letter, which I hope you have now received and which gives you the forgiveness you asked for, now and always, on the one condition that you will love me as you used to, for if I have that, everything else will follow. It gave me so much joy to hear from you because my heart was torn with perturbation and unease at our being so far from each other. I had written a petition and very much wanted Reymont [her kinsman] to bring it, but he thought it would be better to wait until I had news from you. Now that we have this I will beg him to present the petition in my name and I very much hope that he does so. God grant that some good may come of it, but alas, there is no art or learning in it; only my own wishes, expressed as well as I could, for I have said nothing of your matter to a living soul, not even to our friends, and have not asked for any help, but have helped myself as best I could so that on our side, at least, your matter is kept secret. It is perhaps enough if the Lord grant us his grace and make the gentlemen show mercy to us as I pray and hope He will. Our little children pray twice or three times each day for you and hope that the Lord brings you home to us. My hope is that all our prayers will be heard. As to finding explanations for your absence, it is already too late for that, for where you are has become common knowledge, not just here but in Antwerp; though no one knows why; and we say what we agreed with Reymont, that you will soon come home, and that has done much to stop the gossip. I have also written as properly as possible to our parents, who, like all our friends, have been stricken with unspeakable sorrow and cannot rest easy until they have news that you are back at home. You say in your letter that I should show no pain or dismay, which is quite impossible for I have not a moment without them. As people say, feigning gladness in sadness hurts the worst. Nonetheless I do my best, but I never go out of the house so that I am not much seen, and to those who come to talk with me, I explain that I am so distressed by the rumors and gossip that are being spread about you. You say also that all these things must always be kept secret; you do not even have to ask this, for I shall surely do it and I shall be able to as long as you are well; but should things go badly for you, which God forbid, then I could not stay silent for otherwise people would say, as they already do around the Friedenburg, that you have been imprisoned for treason, and that would be even more

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shameful for you, me and the children. For, pray God correct it, the world has come to such a pass that even if the sin is so great, it is still no shame for the man and if it goes well with you and you come home, everyone will say that I should expect as much and should be well contented. As for your writing that I should move away from home, that I cannot do. Jacques Charlier who brought me your letter gave me an order from his highness in which he instructs me to stay in the house until you return home, which Count Johan has said should be within fourteen days, and his order was written on Friday, the 13th of March; so I shall not do anything about leaving before you return, which, with God's mercy and that of the good gentlemen, I hope shall be as the Count has written. . . . And so I dearly pray you to trust in the Lord as I do and commend yourself to him. I trust steadfastly that he will not punish me too harshly and keep us so woefully parted, for that would be too great a trial to endure patiently. I am so sick at heart that I think the cross I should have to bear would be too heavy, and so I pray to God to lift it from me, to whom I commend you, as I and the children commend ourselves to your good grace.

Cologne, the First of April, 1571.

Maria must have set down her pen close to midnight, but before she could seal the letter, a note from Jan arrived, and she wrote again. Even as she sought to console her husband, she herself seemed close to breakdown.

Dear and most beloved husband,

After I had written the enclosed letter, our messenger we had sent you arrived and brought me a letter from you which gladdened me since I see that you are happy with my forgiveness. I never thought that you could believe that I would make any difficulties about that, as indeed I have not. How could I be so severe with you when you are in such perilous straits and when I would gladly give my life's blood to help you if it were possible? And were it not so, how could it be that so great a hatred should have replaced so long a companionship that I could not forgive a little misdeed against myself when not a day goes by when I do not pray the heavenly Father for forgiveness for the many great misdeeds that I commit as I forgive those who commit them against me? I should be like the wicked steward who had been quitted by his master of so many great debts only to force his brother to pay a trifling sum, even down to the very last penny. You may rest easy that you are wholly forgiven; God grant that this be enough to set you free; so that we may soon enough rejoice; for there is nothing in your letter to assure me. I can scarcely read it for I think my heart will break since it shows me you have given yourself up for a lost man and speak as if you will die. I am so distressed I know not what I write. It seems you think I desire your death since you want me to

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accept it as satisfaction. Ah, what an affliction it is for me to hear you say that; it passes all endurance. If there is no mercy left, where shall I go, where can I find it? I must ask it of Heaven with my endless cries and tears. I hope that the Lord will hear me and soften the hearts of the princes that they may hear our prayers and take pity, otherwise it is certain that in putting you to death I will die also, of heartache. The moment I hear the news my heart will stop. But I still have hope as I have written in my other letter, from what the Count has told me, despite your sorrowful letter that has left me so grieving that I am almost blind and can scarcely see to write. People say we should be brave and that you will come home; we had this from Countess Hoogstraaten yesterday and from many others who have said that things are better after Jacques had been [to see the Count]. O God, how surprised he would be to hear you turn everything in his letter upside down! One thing that still gives me courage is that you say that Count Johan answered him that he would do what was possible according to his honor; for I cannot think anything but that his honor would be best kept with you living. . . . In my heart I cannot accept that we will stay forever cruelly and so sadly separated for I so little imagined this on the day of your departure. Oh Lord I could not survive it. My soul is so bound up and united with yours that I feel and suffer exactly as you. If the good gentlemen could see my tears, were they made of stone or wood they would surely have mercy; and so if there were no hope I should try this last extremity, [and go see the Count] even if you were to write expressly that I should not do it. Ah, we ask not for justice but for pity, pity, and if we are not to obtain it, how should we go on? Ah, merciful heavenly father, will you not help us? You surely do not desire the death of sinners; but rather that they should live to repent! Ah, pour on the hearts of the princes, whom we have so angered, the spirit of your compassion, so that we may be saved and brought out of this great fear and sorrow; for it has afflicted us so long. Strengthen our faith, Lord, for if it is commanded we should save as much as a mustardseed, how much more should the life of a man be inviolable! I doubt and hope; yet is my hope still stronger than my doubts and I will throw myself on the mercy and goodness of God and of the good princes. . . . I pray you not to think so much on ill things but be as brave as you can. Evil comes soon enough of its own accord, and to be always thinking on and fearing death is worse than death itself. So drive that from your heart. I have hope and faith that God will treat us more mercifully and will bring us both some happiness out of all this sorrow; so I pray from the bottom of my heart and commend you to the almighty Lord, so that he may strengthen you with his holy spirit. I shall do all my best to pray to the Lord for you; so also do our children. They greet you and long so much to see you, as do I, the Lord only knows! Written the 1st of April at night between twelve and one o'clock.—and do not write any longer "your unworthy husband," for it is truly forgiven.

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If Maria believed the heavenly powers would hear her tormented supplications, she was less confident about the earthly powers. When it became clear that her friends' optimism about Jan's quick release was unfounded, she could not bear to await life-or-death news trapped in her house on the Rinkenpfuhl. So despite strict instructions from the Count's men to remain in Cologne, Maria took herself to Siegen in the third week of May. From that place, marked forever with her husband's transgression, she sent an impassioned letter to Count Johan, imploring forgiveness for Jan and taking the liberty of inquiring whether she might be allowed to see him.

Though she was in a world of Protestants, she still acted instinctively as the intercessor whose name she bore, the Virgin whose exposed breast implored the Father to be merciful to the iniquitous. Maria would not go that far, but she would do everything in her power to wring compassion from the lordly. When they disdained to answer her letters, she moved herself even closer to their anger, traveling to a hamlet that was barely a mile from Dillenburg itself. More letters followed, inquiring anxiously after her husband's health. Emboldened by her persistence, Jan then asked his captors whether they might not allow him a brief moment with his wife, the paragon of steadfastness, so that he could hear "from her own mouth the word *forgiveness.*" Just a minute or two at the gate of the castle, in the evening, would suffice. And if that could not be granted, might she not at least be permitted to walk beneath the castle walls so that he could see her through his barred window?

Hearts did not melt. Permission was harshly denied, and Maria peremptorily ordered to remove herself from Dillenburg. It was a bad sign. Jan's letters once again darkened. "If I receive my sentence of death, then you should write to your parents that I have suddenly been sent to another country," he wrote. "Before my death I will give you further instructions concerning your person and the children." Once more he counseled Maria to leave Cologne to escape the shadow of his own infamy. She could return to Antwerp to her parents, who would surely take her in, or perhaps move to Aachen or Cleves. It was as if Jan were already making his will, and though in obedience to Maria's generous insistence he now signed his letters "your dear husband" rather than "your unworthy husband," he added the cautionary proviso "for as long as God alone knows."

In agonies of uncertainty, Maria nonetheless refused all counsels of despair. Her astonishing letters to Jan make it plain that, from the very beginning of the calamity, she was determined that her family would survive. And though she must have been terrified of being left alone with her children, virtually paupered, there is no doubt that the intense emotional bond with her husband—their *vrientschap*, their companionship—would also survive this deep wound.

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In October 1572, Maria's ordeal reached a critical point. Jan was brought from Dillenburg to another of the Nassau castles, Beilstein, where Princess Anna had been locked away since the revelation of her crime. There the two sinners were made to confront each other, in a proceeding that was more tribunal than formal trial, and confess their guilt. Both had been reduced to pathetic phantoms of their former selves, the lawyer no longer sententious, the Princess no longer uproarious. It had been otherwise in the days following Jan's arrest. Shown reports of her misconduct by Count Johan, Anna had admitted nothing; she wrote to William protesting her innocence and complaining indignantly about the "traitors" who had sullied her good name. Three days later, on March 25, she wrote secretly to Rubens in precisely the opposite vein, acknowledging her guilt. As late as June, she was insisting to a French Protestant pastor that she had been falsely accused, and had no scruples about comparing her plight to that of the apocryphal Susanna, slandered by the elders whose lust she had resisted! But by the summer, her belly must have been big enough to test even the most expansive farthingale's capacity for disguise. Her pregnancy, for which her absent husband could hardly have been responsible, sealed her fate.

After she had owned up to her sin, Anna was taken to yet another Nassau residence, at Dietz, where she lived through the remaining months of her pregnancy, a prisoner and a pariah. Her Saxon family, mortified by the disgrace that her adultery had brought upon their house and on the marriage they had worked so hard to bring about, all but disowned her. Their awareness of her culpability was no obstacle to their affecting to be affronted by her treatment and—once it became clear that William was instituting proceedings for a separation and divorce—demanding the return of her dowry.

On August 22, 1571, Anna was delivered of an infant girl. The child was named Christine von Dietz and immediately repudiated by Prince William. Like all of Anna's offspring, the baby was sickly and given little chance of survival. Inconveniently, though, Christine lived, and, grudgingly lodged at Dillenburg, was condemned to a melancholy and anomalous existence, referred to by her uncle Johan and her half-brother Maurice simply as *la fillette,* the little girl. At some point, they must have acknowledged that she could not be held culpable for her mother's guilt, since Christine eventually made a perfectly good marriage to a well-born Nassau magistrate, after which, doubtless to her own contentment, she disappears from the historical record.

Anna, on the other hand, was nothing more than a criminal embarrassment. After the birth of her daughter, she was removed to Beilstein and kept under lock and key, lest she contrive any further mischief. As soon as the divorce was enacted, she was packed off back to Dresden, where she lived only a few years more, in close confinement, until her

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death, in December 1577, relieved everyone concerned of the burden of her wretchedness. Anna of Saxony was, at least, allowed the dignity of being buried in her family's ancestral tomb at Meissen.

Two years earlier, William had remarried, this time happily, to Charlotte of Bourbon, fresh from the convent. It was the confession of guilt duly signed by Anna and Jan that had set the Prince free to take this step. Once the marriage was safely in place, Rubens's condition was bound to change, for the better or for the worse. And despite her husband's fits of pessimism, Maria seems to have been convinced that, if only for reasons of political expediency, William was unlikely to stage a public trial and execution. Advertising his chagrin as the most eminent cuckold in Europe was not what he needed while he was desperately attempting to restore the fortunes of his political and military campaign in the Netherlands.

Not long after the judicial hearing, Maria was for the first time allowed to see Jan in his cell at Dillenburg. With help from friends, she had been paying for his food and the other costs of his accommodation at the Prince's pleasure, but she could not have been under any illusion that she would find the same man who had left their house for Siegen two and a half years ago. And her husband had indeed become shockingly old and emaciated. Soon after the visit, she finally got the news she had so long awaited. Johan's secretary confirmed that the sentence of death had been set aside. But while that was cause for rejoicing, it was still unclear whether or not Jan would be imprisoned for the rest of his days, which, given his physical condition, Maria now believed would be few.

On March 13, 1573, Maria was desperate enough to invoke the impending Eastertide. She wrote the Count that she

> could not let the Passion of Jesus Christ go by without praying for my husband's freedom. Will Your Grace cast his merciful eyes on us all and bring us back together, not just for the sake of my husband who for two years has suffered great torment and passion; but also for myself, who during this time have been innocent, and for the sake of my poor children, who have seen not only the ruin of their father but their mother's grief and the distress of her senses, and who are all now thrown amongst strangers and know not, alas, whether we shall ever see our mother and father's house again?

Perhaps Count Johan and his fellow jailers did not care to be classified in the same moral category as Pontius Pilate. For shortly afterward, Maria received the long-awaited letter spelling out the terms on which her husband would finally see the light of day. On payment of a bond of six thousand thalers, Rubens was to be allowed to live in Siegen, under the jurisdiction of the Count and subject to supervision by one of his officers. Though he would be reunited with his wife and children, the family's

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liberty was to be severely circumscribed. Rubens was strictly forbidden to leave the house on any pretext whatsoever, including attending any kind of church. Those who might visit had to be proven acceptable to the Count. Since Rubens would be unable to exercise his profession, the family would receive interest on the six-thousand-thaler bond at an annual rate of 5 percent, which had been calculated to suffice for a modest subsistence. The parties concerned—the Prince, the Count, and the offended Landgrave and Elector of Saxony—all reserved the right to cancel this arrangement at any time, to bring Rubens to trial once more, or to demand he surrender for imprisonment. Any infraction of the agreement automatically annulled his freedom and might well result in his immediate death.

Harsh though these conditions were, Maria embraced them with unutterable relief and joy. At first, the money seemed a daunting, perhaps prohibitive, obstacle, but a number of Netherlands exiles rallied round her in her distress and managed to produce the required sum. As soon as this was settled, Maria, who had stayed at Dillenburg to try and speed up Jan's release, returned to Cologne to close the house and take the family's movables, such as they were, to Siegen. Though she had hoped to settle in the country hamlet of Herborn, just outside the town, her prospective landlady, the widow of a court functionary, soon made plain her objections to housing a jailbird. Traipsing from inn to inn, Maria discovered how hard it was to find lodgings that were willing to accommodate her six children and were sufficiently out of the way so as not to attract attention from the burghers of Siegen. Eventually, some rooms in a modest house owned by another court official were made available. On the tenth of May, Pentecost—the feast of the Holy Ghost, the true consoler—the gate of Dillenburg castle was opened for the prisoner and a horse was saddled for him. The road to Siegen lay before him, open and free.

It was not long, of course, before Jan Rubens found things to complain about. Siegen was a crowded, smoky little town of iron smiths and metalworkers, a far cry from the grandeur and elegance of Cologne. Deprived of the street and the market, forbidden either to make or to receive visits, squeezing six children and two adults into a cramped set of rooms, they were, they discovered, undergoing another kind of imprisonment. Risking accusations of ingratitude, Jan lost no time in renewing his requests to the Dillenburg chancellery to be allowed to take walks by the city walls, where the air might assist the recovery of his enfeebled health. He also asked to be allowed to attend some form of church service, "so necessary for a sinner." The second request was categorically denied, but Johan was prepared to allow Rubens to take the occasional promenade under the watchful supervision of an appointed official.

There were other problems and grievances. Given his confinement, it

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was virtually impossible for Rubens to resume his old vocation. And since the war effectively cut off all possibility of help from their families in Flanders, the Rubenses were entirely dependent on the three hundred thalers that made up the promised interest payments on Jan's six-thousand-thaler ransom. All too often, though, the money failed to materialize when promised at the half year, and sometimes it failed to materialize at all. Maria wrote letters of complaint, but at the same time she knew that the best weapon to nudge the consciences of the Count and his brother was her own blameless virtue.

Her husband, though, came close to overplaying his hand. In December 1575, angry letters from Dillenburg accused Rubens of all kinds of presumptuous wickedness: taking unsupervised walks hither and thither about the town; receiving unauthorized letters from Heidelberg and Cologne; and, most scandalous of all, going to sup with a friend of a Friday evening. Since Jan had so brazenly violated the terms of his release, the Count decided to impose harsher restraints. Leaving the house, for whatever reason, would henceforth be forbidden, on pain of renewed imprisonment; and Jan could put aside any vain hope of ever being permitted to attend public worship.

Though the reports of his transgressions seemed regrettably specific, Jan denied every allegation, protesting that not only were the charges without any foundation, but they had in all likelihood been invented by ill-disposed persons. Had he, perhaps, some machination on the part of his old mistress in mind? Might it have been one of the respectable burghers of Siegen, resentful of the scoundrel in their midst? Aware that his wife could exercise more moral suasion than he could, Rubens had her write twice to Dillenburg, at his dictation, in a rather lofty and awkward French. Her first letter smarts with wounded dismay: "for a false rumor, our little liberty has been taken away . . . , in any event there is no reason to impose this new burden on myself or the children . . . we shall be shunned like the plague." The second letter, written the following March and sounding a lot more like the real Maria, replaced indignation with humility: "we bow ourselves before your feet; now that spring is coming when God renews the earth and all creatures rejoice, might my husband once more have his freedom and be allowed to take walks again, to restore his sick body and declining spirits?"

The answer, inevitably, was no. But even while rejecting the Rubenses' appeals for leniency, Count Johan's secretary held out some bare glimmer of hope. Though the Elector of Saxony and the Landgrave of Hesse were still not in a forgiving vein, the Count, he implied, was not himself averse to clemency. What Jan and Maria truly hoped for was an end to their Siegen house arrest: the possibility of removing themselves to some place farther off where the husband could resume his profession and the wife could be unafraid of whispered gossip in the market.

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By the end of 1577, an auspicious conjunction of events stirred their hopes again. Anna died in December. Prince William had been contentedly and fruitfully married for two years, and his political fortunes had taken a turn for the better. The rebellion against Alva had finally driven the Duke from the Netherlands in November 1573. Four years later a truce divided the country into two confessional states, with Protestantism dominant in the north and Catholicism in the south. In the autumn, William made triumphal entries into Antwerp and Brussels, the cities from which, ten years before, he had fled as an accused traitor.

What might now soften the severity of the princes? Appeals to the sacred and seasonal calendar had failed to move them. And the case was hardly helped by a tactless letter, drafted by Jan and sent in the hand of Maria, unfavorably comparing the harshness of the Saxon laws on adultery with penalties set out in the Jewish Testament and in Greek, Roman, and even Ottoman law. But with the political and military map of Europe changed, apparently for the better, might the new peace bring with it a gentler future for the Rubens family? Two more children had been added to the household: Philip in 1574, and, on the feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul, 1577, another boy, who was named for the two saints.

In the year of Peter Paul's birth, both Maria and her mother wrote the Count to intercede once more with William, asking if, now that the Pacification had come to their homeland, might they perhaps be allowed to return? The Prince, perennially fearful that the old scandal might somehow ooze into public view, was not prepared to grant their request. But in the spring of 1578, Count Johan was authorized to make a second agreement with Jan Rubens that would license the family to remove themselves from Siegen to some other place, provided it was not within the borders of the Netherlands. After all her efforts to reach the consciences of the Nassau princes, Maria had discovered that the way to their hearts lay through their pockets. Throughout 1577 she had, with increasing force, protested the Count's failure to pay the stipulated interest sum for their maintenance. And though in earlier times the six thousand thalers of Rubens's ransom might not have been a serious sum for the House of Orange, Johan's position, as both Count and Stadholder of the Dutch province of Gelderland, was necessarily parsimonious. The price for being allowed to move was abandoning claims to past and future payments.

By the end of 1578, seven years after Jan Rubens's arrest, the family was back in Cologne. Whether they were able to cobble together the shattered pieces of their old life is still hard to say. Though Jan may never have returned to the practice of the law, business letters to and from a Frankfurt financier suggest that he was finding some way to support the family, and it may be that in the interregnum between two periods of warfare, some of his lost funds and rents from the north may have been

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restored. The tight restrictions on the family's freedom of movement no longer applied, and the Rubenses became practicing members of one of the Lutheran congregations of the city. Even the ominous name of the house they rented in the Sternengasse, "The House of the Ravens," cast no dark spell over the air of normality that settled on them once more. Another child, the last, Bartholomeus, was born in 1581.

Jan was not quite free of his long nightmare. In September 1582, without any warning, he was ordered to return to Siegen by the first of November in order to be placed again in some form of captivity. The shock to the family must have been traumatic. Eleven years since Jan's arrest, and nine years since his release from Dillenburg, the scab was abruptly struck and the wound made to bleed. Rubens's oldest son was now twenty and betrothed to a daughter of the solid *burgertum.* How would the children survive the scandal? How would they all?

Again, it was Maria who understood what needed to be done. From Count Johan's counselors she soon discovered that the reason for the summons had not been any infraction of her husband's terms of parole, but a complaint from Anna's Saxon family about the fate of Christine, the fruit of the dishonorable union. Now eleven years old, the unwanted child was being thrust on Rubens's sense of paternal responsibility. Christian though she was, Maria was not about to assent to having her family torn asunder yet again for the sake of the unfortunate little girl. And there was the matter of supporting Christine, no small thing since the family was already pressed to the limit to support itself. "For the welfare of our children, for their education and advancement, we have spent more than we can afford," Jan wrote to Count Johan, adding that such was their extremity that Maria had now had to apply herself to business, and he himself was "laboring night and day to earn bread for my seven children, my wife and myself." No doubt the plea of poverty was sincere enough, but Jan was probably ill advised to add a typically excessive disquisition on the laws and customs of legitimacy and illegitimacy in the Germanic lands. Maria's tactic was altogether more practical. You wish my husband to return to prison? Very well, then, the terms of the original agreement of 1573 prescribe the return of the full six thousand thalers.

This was real tennis. A silence ensued, then a concession. The Nassau family had finally decided to cut their losses. On January 10, 1583, it was affirmed that Jan Rubens was hereby and henceforth free from any imprisonment and any further penalty. He had at last served his term. In a private letter, the Count also affirmed that he had (as always) been moved to this last act of mercy by the "prayers of Rubens's *huysvrouw,*" Maria.

There was one last condition that remained attached to the long-sought, dearly bought liberty of Jan Rubens: that he would never, ever by intent or accident, come within sight of His Grace and Highness, William, Prince of Orange, lest the said lord, reminded of a vile thing, become

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overmastered with passion, permit his reason to succumb to rage, and be tempted to lift his hand against the malefactor. To avoid any such eventuality, Rubens was, for the remainder of his days, banished from the lands of the seventeen provinces of the Netherlands, north or south.

Eighteen months later, the sentence became academic (though it was never annulled). In June 1580, Philip II had proscribed William as "the chief disturber of our state of Christendom" and offered twenty-five thousand ecus to anyone who might venture to kill him. Between Catholic malcontents and militant Calvinists, there was no lack of aspiring murderers. In March 1582, William was shot at point-blank range in Antwerp by a hired assassin. The gun exploded in the assassin's hand, and its discharge tore away part of the Prince's face. But although he lost massive amounts of blood and was twice given up for dead, William survived, aided first by his physician, who pressed a lead pellet to the wound, and then by shifts of attendants, who held their fingers to the cavity. Protestant ministers throughout Europe praised God for the miracle.

Two years later, in July 1584, William was shot to death by a cabinetmaker. William had himself provided the money, twelve crowns, that had bought the murder weapons: the assassin had pretended to be in the service of one of the Prince's allies and complained that his poverty prevented him from returning to his camp. William's last complete sentence was "My God, take pity on my soul, and take pity on this poor people." When asked whether he died reconciled with Christ, he responded weakly in the affirmative.

Three years later, on the first day of March, 1587, in a bulky house in Cologne, Jan Rubens died in his bed. Before his last sickness he seems to have undergone a momentous change of heart—or perhaps, after all, he needed serious absolution. For he returned to his Catholic confession. Restored to honor and even respectability, he was interred in the Church of St. Peter.

Fifty-three years later, his son Peter Paul Rubens died in a palatial house in his ancestral city of Antwerp. Among the unfinished works in his estate was a *Crucifixion of Peter* commissioned for the church where his father was buried. In his suffering, nailed to an inverted cross, the saint seems more than usually tormented. But then, Peter was, of all the apostles other than Judas, the most deeply marked by human failings.

Peter Paul, who had been born while his father was under house arrest in Siegen, was known throughout Europe not just as a prodigious painter but as a paragon of unblemished public and private virtue. Yet the younger Rubens was also the incomparable enthusiast of fleshly abundance, of fertile sensuality. Perhaps his father's disgrace had strengthened his resolution that he would lead a life of unimpeachable probity, and that when he celebrated the sweetness of desire, the festivities would be confined to the fragrant garden of painting.

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Coolness

DANIEL HARRIS

At the end of Godard's *Breathless,* Jean-Paul Belmondo is trapped in a police dragnet and shot in the back as he runs down the street, staggering for nearly a block before he falls face first on the pavement, casually puffing a cigarette even as his knees buckle and his eyes begin to glaze over. In the face of death, he remains blasé and imperturbable, exhibiting an unearthly sangfroid that can also be seen in the surly punk in *Rebel Without a Cause* who, during a game of chicken, casually combs his hair, gazing admiringly at his image in the rearview mirror while he slams the gas pedal to the floor and speeds toward the edge of the cliff. Similarly, the beautiful blonde in Paul Morrissey's *Mixed Blood* continues speaking after she is shot point-blank in the head, turning to her lover as she slumps in her chair, her hair matted with gore, and apologizing, with implausible presence of mind, "I must look like a mess."

The stylish unflappability of these martyred saints of coolness has a number of cultural antecedents: the brooding virility of the detectives in film noir and hard-boiled fiction; the studied hipness of beatniks and jazz musicians; and, perhaps most important, the repressed violence of proletarian youth, of homeboys and gangbangers whose poutiness is more than just a colorful affectation, as insignificant as their Tommy Hilfiger parkas and Nike sweats. Their contemptuous disengagement serves a highly utilitarian function in an increasingly uncontrollable urban environment where chaos breeds fantasies of exaggerated self-possession. Coolness is an aesthetic of the streets, a style of deportment specifically designed to alert potential predators of one's impregnability to assault. Far from reflecting confidence, such coolness grows out of a sense of

Daniel Harris is the author of *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* and a frequent contributor to *Salmagundi*. Basic Books will publish his next book in the spring of 2000.

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threat, of the strain of living in metropolitan war zones where one's equanimity is constantly being challenged, giving rise to a hypermasculine folk religion that fetishizes poise and impassivity. Its often hilarious mannerisms, its swaggering gait and hostile stares, constitute a pragmatic form of aesthetic self-defense, a disguise that fends off aggression through a flamboyant charade of toughness and authority, a truculent insularity that provides psychological camouflage for the ghetto dweller, projecting fearlessness and tranquillity amidst danger.

As one pop culture pundit has so succinctly put it, "where the ghetto goes, the suburbs follow." Attracted by the menacing nonchalance of coolness, prosperous white youths have turned a form of behavior adapted for a very specific social milieu into an aesthetic plaything, mimicking gestures and facial expressions designed as deterrents to attack even in situations in which there is no threat, in which the glowering introversion of the mall rat seems entirely gratuitous, having been removed from its original context, where survival often depends on feigning an air of unruffled calm. The worship of the ghetto even led the white rapper Vanilla Ice to invent for himself a spurious war record, complete with mendacious scars, the proud stigmata of the five knife fights that this self-styled gang member asserts he only miraculously survived—an unsubstantiated claim that the press refuted when it revealed that he grew up in a wealthy suburb. Suburban coolness, in short, is mean-street behavior without mean streets, the bedroom community in search of the ghetto, the inner city bused into the burbs for a party on a cul-de-sac, where it has become part of the imposture of privileged youths desperate to rid themselves of what they perceive as the taint of inauthenticity.

The chic of poverty is central to advertising directed at the youth market. The origins of coolness in the instability of the inner city can be seen in countless ads that confront us with a wall of scowling teenagers in dark shades, their arms folded threateningly over their chests, looking bored and volatile as they light their Lucky Strikes and thrust out at us huge, glowing sneakers made for "urban and suburban beat warriors." Photographs advertising bands, in particular, explicitly evoke images of gangs of unemployed youths hanging out on street corners, frequently shot from below so that they tower above us, hurling insults, blocking our way, and daring us to pass. Album covers and clothing advertisements often have the same underlying plot: that of the ambush, a figurative recreation of a physical confrontation on the streets, where we turn a corner only to find ourselves face-to-face with a pack of belligerent hoodlums—the skaterpunk band Rancid sprawling against a chain-link fence twisted with barbed wire, or the heavy-metal group ProPain standing before the dilapidated shell of an abandoned crack house covered with graffiti. The subtext of many cool ads is imminent attack, a message that

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takes the saber-rattling defensiveness of urban youth, an attitude with a clear, self-protective purpose, and reduces it to pure style, a fashionable sulkiness useful in selling tracksuits and CDs.

Coolness offers the disaffected middle class an enticing fantasy—that of going downscale, of descending into abysmal yet liberating poverty, as in the film *Desperately Seeking Susan,* in which a bored housewife, the angst-ridden consort of a wealthy businessman, attempts to alleviate the psychological burden of affluence by modeling herself on the life-force figure of Madonna, a slatternly hedonist who robs her tricks, cadges off her friends, and dries her armpits under bathroom blow-dryers. And yet the class devolution involved in this odyssey of imaginary indigence almost invariably presents an extremely stylized vision of destitution, one based not on austerity but on conspicuous consumption—the acquisition of enormous quantities of clothing and kitsch, from bell-bottoms, miniskirts, and go-go boots to snow globes, lava lamps, and ceramic Minnie Mouses.

Long stretches of the ultra-cool film *Liquid Sky,* for instance, consist of a systematic investigation of the way its demimonde of urbane low life—narcoleptic junkies and homicidal androgynes—decorate their squalid hovels, which are crowded with self-parodying displays of thrift-store refuse that attest to the characters' scathing contempt for bourgeois tastefulness. In this caricature of bohemian life, Mother Hubbard's cupboards are rarely bare; they are more often crammed with bric-a-brac, a strangely abundant kind of poverty whose over-accessorized copiousness exposes the fraud of coolness and its Dickensian cult of make-believe mendicancy. It is a game infused with an ineradicably middle-class sense of comfort.

Coolness transforms shopping into scavenging—prowling the streets for battered windfalls left at the side of the road, as in Andy Warhol's *Trash,* in which Holly Woodlawn and Joe D'Allesandro comb through garbage cans for salvageable pieces of furniture and chic items of vintage clothing. Shopping in funky boutiques is central to the myth of coolness, which strips consumption of its materialism by portraying it as the ingenious foraging of a new type of inner-city bottom-feeder, an urban hunter-gatherer, a discriminating ragpicker who despises brand-new commodities and makes do with serendipitous finds that have no clear provenance, no price tag that identifies their place of origin. Coolness takes the traditional consumer cycle—the rapid decline of a recently purchased article of clothing or appliance from ultra-modern newness to decrepit obsolescence—and reverses it, making the waste product itself, not the brand-new acquisition, the valuable commodity; the piece of detritus the coveted fetish item. Even an advertisement for such an archetypal factory-made luxury as a Ford ZX2 capitalizes on the cachet of trash and the myth of the nattily dressed derelict scrounging for retro debris:

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> Stacy just got a "hip" transplant. And I'm not talking about a medical procedure. See, she bought a new Ford ZX2 and her whole image changed. First she switched her major from Accounting to Graphic Design. Then, she started buying these "funky" clothes from a second-hand store. Pretty big changes. But I guess we should have seen them coming. Because with a Ford ZX2, you're pretty much telling the world you've decided to excuse yourself from the predictable.

The worship of kitsch is so important to coolness because the hand-me-downs sold in trendy junk shops have been liberated from the stigma of consumerism and the tyranny of the brand-new, thus elevating shopping to an activity of a higher magnitude, that of exhuming priceless artifacts from the bottom of the bargain barrel. Kitsch, in short, is to the hipster what quaintness is to the housewife, a way of sanitizing consumerism, of endowing it with moral and aesthetic respectability. Coolness toys with the fiction of grinding poverty, evoking the romance of the scruffy, middle-class pack rat, the creative recycler of orphaned objects rescued from the incinerator and the landfill. But its masquerade of destitution is an act of bad faith in that it also fetishizes all of the appurtenances of high technology, the twenty-first-century gizmos that its would-be ragamuffins are constantly pulling out of their backpacks: cell phones, Motorola pagers, and Pioneer Compact Disc Players. The Target chain claims to specialize in "cool" merchandise, offering everything you need to "transform your abode into a den of chill repute"—PlayStations, joysticks, boom boxes, and stereo systems, electronic status symbols for the hip young consumer who is "technologically aggressive and style-progressive, an information addict and an inspector of gadgets."

Despite its pretenses of insolvency, coolness revolves around the worship of big-ticket items, the very mechanisms that make the status quo possible. This apparatus of power represents the most conventional aspects of our society, but has nonetheless become integral to the distinctly futuristic image of the cyberspace rebel whose coolness inheres in his graceful mastery of machines, his effortless ability to crack the codes of ATMs and hack into his high school's computer. Even in *On the Road*, a novel that is said to have "defined a generation," the suave virility of Jack Kerouac's unmitigatedly cool bon vivants is bound up with the distinctly masculine ease with which they operate large vehicles, as in the case of a parking-lot attendant so skilled at his trade that

> he can back a car forty miles an hour into a tight squeeze and stop at the wall, jump out, race among fenders, leap into another car, circle it fifty miles an hour in a narrow space, back swiftly into a tight spot.

Coolness offers a cartoonish portrait of a technological pastoral, a world

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we have mastered with our bravura skills as engineers. For this reason, it plays a key role in staffing the firms of Silicon Valley, which revel in a quixotic mystique, promoting the enticing stereotype of the software designer as a wizard, a maladjusted iconoclast who designs complex inventions inaccesssible to the technologically illiterate.

Everything from the French Nouvelle Vague and *Going Places* to *On the Road* and *Easy Rider* has drawn upon a related aspect of coolness: cool tourism, the obsession with aimless travel, with the picaresque journeys of rambling vagabonds constantly on the move, goaded on not by curiosity but by their own internal demons. Directionless spiritual odysseys are basic to the narrative of cool art and advertisements, which celebrate the freedom of the open highway, a life without responsibilities, the unambitious insouciance of the corporate hobo. A Sony ad for the Discman player advises you to "buckle your seatbelts, hit the gas, put in some tunes and don't look back . . . you can rock & roll down that highway called life and never miss a beat. . . . Ahhh, the open road, the wind in your hair, your favorite CDs."

These myths of existential tourism, of the wanderlust of rambling itinerants who have rejected the tedium of a settled domestic life and embraced instead the nomadic existence of motorized gypsies, have proven especially important for the automobile industry, whose advertisements play upon one of the central fantasies of coolness: dropping everything, turning one's back on the little cottage with the white picket fence, and speeding away in one's car. Companies like Ford, Jeep, and Chevrolet describe their evocatively named Mustangs, Wranglers, Renegades, and Rovers as getaway vehicles that enable the staid middle class, the prisoners of monotonous jobs and demanding families, to break loose and roar off into the sunset, leaving in their wake the acrid scent of burned rubber. When Harley-Davidson tells us that "all we know for sure is, the road is infinite," they have turned gas-guzzling into a Zen-like meditative state, preaching the therapy of the speedometer and promoting mindless locomotion as a sedative for bourgeois restlessness and dissatisfaction.

The basic credo of coolness is nihilism, the apocalyptic and somewhat theatrical belief that the American Dream has failed, that success is a trap, that, as one popular hip T-shirt puts it, LIFE SUCKS AND THEN YOU DIE. This philosophy of affected gloom suggests that all that matters is the present, getting high, hanging out, indulging the senses, ignoring the rat race. This catatonic pretense of anesthetized cynicism inevitably leads to its opposite: frenzied epicureanism, a carpe-diem tendency to equate meaning with the instantaneous gratification of desire. While cool nihilism would seem to represent a wholesale rejection of the materialism of consumer society and its spiritual bankruptcy, it is, in fact, the ultimate consumerist worldview, in that its decimating negativity encourages con-

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spicuous consumption and impulse buying—a permission to purchase stimulated by its transparently literary despair. Nihilism becomes a rationale for consumption, the bitter hatred of the corporate world a license to pamper oneself with its luxuries. The anti-materialism of coolness is thus conveniently expressed in highly materialistic ways.

But hipness is more than just a futile attempt on the part of unglamorous Caucasians to rationalize their extravagance and refashion themselves in the image of brutish proles, the "white Negroes" (or, in contemporary Ebonic parlance, the "wiggers") celebrated by Norman Mailer in his seminal 1959 article, which stated that in coolness's "wedding of the white and the black, it was the Negro who brought the cultural dowry." Coolness also represents the wholesale denial of innocence on the part of youth culture, which has begun a full-fledged campaign to accelerate the process of aging in a world in which the demeaning infantilism of childhood has been artificially prolonged well beyond its developmental limits in adolescence. Far from being the threshold of adulthood, puberty still remains mired in the trappings of the nursery—a sexless limbo in which individuals who have reached physical maturity are nonetheless held captive in their cribs, their sexual impulses kept carefully in check, policed by censorious guardians intent on turning back the hands of their biological clocks.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the romantic cult of the child resulted in the forced infantilization of children by overprotective parents who clung to seraphic visions of their offspring's innocence even as the social conditions of child rearing began to change dramatically. Adolescents spent less and less time jealously sheltered in the bosom of once-insular families, having been forced instead to fend for themselves on the playgrounds of public schools and in potentially brutalizing social organizations like the Boy Scouts and Little League. Coolness represents the final collapse of the romantic movement's fetishization of the child, the demise of the religion of innocence, the disappearance of sacred tenets of artlessness and chastity hastened by the impatience of sexually informed teenagers fed up with their chimeric status as angelic eunuchs.

The adolescent's rebellion against centuries of child worship, as well as against the empty banalities of consumerism, takes one of its most violent forms in its extreme humorlessness and its emphatic rejection of the smile, of "niceness," of the noxious amiability of the service economy, all of which have been supplanted by both a sepulchral air of gravity and an unforthcoming rudeness. The typical cool facial expression is not an actual expression so much as a categorical refusal to betray even a hint of a smile, of a desire to please, and the substitution of a mask of characterless nullity—as in the gangsta rapper Ice Cube's signature snarl or the vampiric fang-baring of innumerable bands intent on showing that, far from being cherubs, they are ghouls, decades older than their years. The

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romantic movement's cult of the child has ended in creating a foul-mouthed enfant terrible who has turned the playground into a cemetery, a necropolis where prematurely aged Byronic figures stagger from the merry-go-round to the seesaw to the jungle gym striking anguished poses of misery and ennui, convinced that their grim-visaged solemnity lends them an air of sophistication and maturity.

Although adolescents would like to believe that the aesthetic of coolness is entirely their own invention, in fact it stems directly from parental hysteria: the anguished hyperboles of nail-biting moms and dads terrified that their children are drifting toward delinquency, swept up in the recreational drug use and reckless promiscuity of the "wrong crowd." Far from being a fresh and innovative expression of the adolescents' own culture, coolness is an expression of another culture altogether. It simply brings parental fears to life, providing a grotesque embodiment of a distinctly middle-class interpretation of freakiness, of what lies beyond the pale of respectable society, where grungy cokeheads with communicable diseases deflower nubile daughters, and the truant sons of upstanding citizens jeopardize their futures by scuffling with the law.

The origin of coolness in the squarest of all possible things, the nightmares of familial worrywarts pacing their living rooms well after curfew, can be seen in the dependence of cool imagery on highly moralistic caricatures of the demonic and the sacrilegious, on reactionary iconography that transforms our rebellious offspring into the spawn of Satan. Inspired by their love of horror movies, members of the rock group Kiss, for instance, assert their coolness by sticking out bright red tongues dripping with drool and slathering their faces with cadaverous greasepaint, a style of B-grade monster makeup as gruesome as the trademark Bride-of-Frankenstein toilette of Marilyn Manson, a/k/a "Anti-Christ Superstar." In its effort to scandalize credulous moms and dads who wring their hands over bad report cards and phone calls from guidance counselors, coolness never succeeds in detaching itself from our society's traditional notions of evil; it has merely created a Halloween aesthetic that conjures up images of an infantile diabolism refracted through the paranoid parental imagination.

One showcase of coolness is the teenager's bedroom, the impenetrable lair of the disgruntled malcontent holed up, in all of his ornery, hormonal testiness, in a slovenly cave plastered with garish posters of Puff Daddy and Funk Master Flex. The cool bedroom is not a tasteful nursery painted Day-Glo colors and equipped with airplane mobiles and shelves of Furbies and Pooh Bears, but a raucous sound studio with speakers the size of refrigerators, which vibrate with the throbbing sounds of Metallica, Neurotica, and Nebula. Such "dens of chill repute" represent an architectural rejection of the whole premise of collectivity

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on which the nuclear family is based, a solipsistic retreat into a protective cell of anti-social individuality from which the grouchy teenage crank launches his assault against his forebearing tribe's harmonious spirit of togetherness.

In the film *House Party,* for instance, the camera enters the room of a cantankerous black rapper and, with the alienated objectivity of an anthropologist examining aboriginal artifacts, begins to inspect what its occupant refers to as "my shit," from a stolen road sign stenciled with the suggestive warning SLIPPERY WHEN WET to the immense collage of *Penthouse* centerfolds covering the walls from floor to ceiling. Such anti–interior decoration offers an aesthetic affront to the quiet, understated tastefulness of the rest of the house, whose conformity to traditional notions of elegance our prodigal sons and daughters satirize with their self-conscious indecorousness. Despite its seeming nihilism and amorality, coolness is an aesthetic with a mission, a tendentious style that ridicules the good taste of the suburban split-level, which it associates with the dreariness of the status quo, with the conventionality of parents who have wasted their entire lives scrimping and saving in order to acquire all the necessary accoutrements of respectability. Coolness thumbs its nose at good taste on moral grounds, inciting a full-scale stylistic mutiny, full of political implications, that demonstrates a surprising streak of righteous purism by denouncing Mom's immaculate French provincial interiors as a symptom of her compliance with the rules of propriety.

One of the appeals of coolness to insecure adolescents is its cultivation of obstreperous ugliness, as in the case of the musician Rob Zombie, who, with a hex mark carved deeply into his forehead, models himself on a decomposing corpse, wearing a grizzled, Whitmanesque beard; or of Ozzie Osborne, whose face is framed by the greasy strands of his shoulder-length hair. Part of the success of coolness among self-conscious teenagers stems from the fact that it is so physically forgiving and democratic, so inclusive, rejecting as it does the cookie-cutter aesthetic of "normal" people, of Barbie and Ken, of the voluptuous blonde cheerleader and her all-American quarterback boyfriend. Cool people actively deride conventional notions of physical beauty, associating wholesome, rosy-cheeked good looks with conformity and devoting themselves instead to the cult of the grotesque—which forms a key part of their attack on go-getting student-council presidents and smugly virtuous teachers' pets. The transformation of the former supermodel Nico from a beauty queen into a scarecrow, a junkie with sinister boiled-egg eyes and rotten teeth, provides an allegory of the anti-aesthetic of coolness, which conflates loveliness and elegance with dullness and mediocrity. Nico's defacement of her own beauty in order to acquire the glamour of coolness shows how the aesthetic of ugliness, like the aesthetic of the teenager's bedroom, is extremely moralistic, based on an almost evangelical contempt for the body,

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a gnostic, self-hating puritanism as fanatical as any fringe sect's insistence on the virtue of plainness.

Despite the high-handed moralism of coolness, which is at its most tendentious when it is at its most perverse, youth culture secretly subscribes to the middle-class ethics and sensibility it professes to abhor. One telling indication of the self-contradictory nature of coolness is that, while adolescents persist in believing that they are bad and sinister and unfit for respectable society, the coolest advertisements featuring the hippest kids giving us the dirtiest looks are often selling the cleanest things—pristine white Calvin Klein underpants, immaculate blue jeans, clean sneakers, and sporty colognes. The corporate vision of coolness is inextricably linked with fastidious grooming, with a well-scrubbed subculture whose members' pestilential taint has been eradicated with freshly laundered clothing, deodorant soaps, and dandruff shampoos.

The hipster not only makes a pigsty of his bedroom and even, despite the prevalence of wholesome advertisements, of his own person, but also engages in noise pollution, another way of defacing the body politic. Breaking the domestic sound barrier with the ear-splitting din of car radios and boom boxes becomes a harmless way to shatter the bourgeois tranquillity of bucolic neighborhoods, and is thus the ultimate anti-social assertion of the unfettered self. Panasonic even goes so far as to describe its stereo speakers as accessories in these seditious acts of gratuitous pandemonium, placing a screaming black teenager next to the words "Blast it. Crank it. Blare it. Let everyone know you're there. . . . It's louder than your mother." Turning up the volume and blowing the roof off is an ersatz way of destroying property, of rattling windows without breaking them, a form of sonic vandalism that produces the effect of chaos and destruction but nevertheless leaves everything intact. Noise, like the affectation of nihilism, constitutes the perfect consumerist rebellion: an apolitical radicalism that reduces activism to acoustics and carefully preserves the world it so blusteringly sets out to destroy.

The centrality of music to the subculture is also related to the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde aesthetic of coolness. No sooner does the record begin to play than the suave demeanor of the introverted hipster gives way to the rage of the savage beast who, far from being soothed by the proverbially civilizing effects of music, is violently stimulated by them, his customary composure collapsing on the dance floor into an epileptic flailing of arms and legs. The hero of the movie *Airheads* prides himself on his "quiet cool" until he and his band take to the stage, whereupon they swing their electric guitars like sledgehammers and, amidst pyrotechnic showers of sparks, smash their equipment to pieces, all the while screeching the words "degenerate, degenerate," the lyrics of their new hit song. The Janus-faced dichotomy between the primal rock and roller and

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his preternaturally serene daily self reflects the wholesale co-optation of youth culture by the record industry, which has supplied an entire generation with a new opium of the people, pop music—a type of commercial communication that has supplanted all other forms of social intercourse. The glum taciturnity of coolness represents the eerie, tongue-tied silence of a culture that has been rendered mute by its favorite pastime, listening to records, struck dumb by the cacophony of tortured superstars whose angry laments prevent conversation, rendering the very need for it superfluous.

The rock band and the inner-city street gang are two of the major inspirations for the look of coolness, which serves a specific sociological function for tightly knit groups whose very survival depends on their ability to create a unified aesthetic identity. Members of gangs use a complex set of visual symbols to express their fierce allegiance to one another (often sealed through sadistic rites of initiation): mismatched shoelaces; the position of the belt buckle in relation to the fly; plastic bracelets in coded colors; and the menacing hieroglyphs of graffiti that delineate their beat, their turf, their sphere of influence. Bands engage in a similar sort of aesthetic demarcation that sets them apart from their competition and creates an instantly recognizable market identity, as can be seen in Korn's matted dreadlocks, Marilyn Manson's gruesomely asymmetrical eyes (cleverly created with color contact lenses), or Kiss's infamous clown makeup, complete with Cowardly Lion whiskers and painted Batman domino masks. Coolness is an aesthetic of insignia, of trademarks, of the passwords and Masonic handshakes through which card-carrying initiates gain entrance to the clubhouse. Just as affluent youths decontextualize the self-protective surliness of their inner-city peers, so they adopt, like designer labels, such identifying badges as black bandannas tied around their thighs or medallions featuring six-pointed stars flanked by flaming pitchforks—emblems that have a specific economic utility, either of mapping out the boundaries of a particular crime syndicate's drug empire or of raising a rock band's profile in a music scene crowded with rivals vying for the media's attention.

But whereas gangs and bands use insignia to create clannishness on a local level, young people in general—desperate to overcome the barriers that divide them and to experience the same camaraderie as the Crips and the Bloods—use trademarks to create insular allegiance on an international level. This has been an enormous boon for manufacturers. If companies like Nike and the Gap can get *their* insignia adopted as the symbol of the pack—*their* "swoosh" trademark, *their* signature leg stripes, *their* headbands decorated with *their* corporate names—they instantly acquire several million freelance advertisers willing to pay for the privilege of spreading the faith and, simultaneously, of achieving visual solidarity

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by wearing the firm's logo. Clothing is now being explicitly designed not just with inconspicuous designer labels sewn onto back pockets but *as* designer labels, as huge insignia in themselves. Copyrighted art emblems are an integral part of Ralph Lauren's Chaps sweatshirts, Benetton's T-shirts, and brands of underwear that feature elastic waistbands as wide as cummerbunds, emblazoned with "Joe Boxer," "Yves St. Laurent," and now even "FTL" (Fruit of the Loom). Manufacturers have recognized that the urgent need to create a pack identity in youth culture can easily be used to consolidate corporate identity. In this synergistic relationship, companies provide the products that foster togetherness among the young, and the young in turn line the coffers of the savvy CEOs who invent the aesthetic markers that have become the consumerist rallying cries of teenagers the world over. In a fragmented society in which major institutions like the church and the community no longer bring people together, owning identical possessions becomes one of the chief ways we overcome our isolation, communing with each other by acquiring the same cars, Walkmen, and basketball sneakers.

The commercialization of youth culture and the rise, for the first time in history, of a monolithic teenage "look" in most Western countries have intensified the psychological instability of adolescence. The sadistic aesthetic divisions between the in-crowd and the out-crowd so integral to the sociology of the schoolyard become even more oppressive when manufacturers begin to use peer pressure and the coercion to conform as a calculated marketing strategy, setting up shop right on the basketball court and in the school cafeteria. The victory of the designer label over the playground has led to the ostracism of those who refuse to carry the most fashionable lunch pails or wear this season's de rigueur dungarees, which advertisers portray as keys to acceptance and popularity, ways to survive a Darwinian struggle in which social success requires the systematic elimination of differences from one's peers. It is this uniformity, however, that coolness cleverly disguises as its opposite, nonconformity—the rebellion of the nay-saying oddball, the fish out of water, the square peg in the round hole who, even as he suppresses every socially unacceptable idiosyncrasy from his personality and reinvents himself in the image of the generic teenager, is magically transformed into an ardent iconoclast for whom shopping becomes nothing less than a subversive form of civil disobedience.

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Bicycle Sprint

PAMELA ALEXANDER

I crouch over the bare
bones of speed, jacket
snapping like silks, face
against the wind's neck.
My steps don't touch ground,
and spokes sprinkle light
like flint-strikes. Pavement blurs
under me-and-machine. I'm
its muscle! and the centaur
I imagined myself as a child.
We gallop the straight roads
of Ohio. Chainring, chain,
freewheel, derailleur—all
fit, click, ratchet right,
catch and quiet into flight.
Down the long flat road at
the bottom of the atmosphere
we're flung. A wheel before me,
one behind, I tuck, hands low.
Frame trembles. Road
leaps. Knees lift and fall.
I sit the saddle, velocity's
clairvoyant, while what's below
spins—cranks and hubs and
planet. For a moment we ride
the earth the bike was mined from
and I will lie in, which turns
as calmly as a story being told.

Pamela Alexander is the author of three books of poems, the most recent of which, *Inland*, won the Iowa Prize. Winner of the Yale Younger Poet Award, she co-directs the Creative Writing Program at Oberlin College.

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Remember This

KATE CAMBOR

In the fifth century B.C., at a banquet given by a nobleman of Thessaly named Scopas, the poet Simonides of Ceos was invited to recite a lyric poem in honor of his host. Because Simonides also included a passage praising the gods Castor and Pollux, Scopas refused to pay more than half the agreed-upon amount for the poem, petulantly telling the poet to obtain the rest from the twin gods of whom he had spoken so warmly. At that moment, Simonides received a message that two young men were waiting for him outside. He went out to find them, but saw no one. During his absence, the roof of the banquet hall collapsed, crushing and killing Scopas and his guests. The invisible callers had been Castor and Pollux, repaying the tribute Simonides had given by drawing him away from the banquet just in the nick of time. Though the corpses were so mangled that the guests' relatives were unable to identify them, Simonides was able to do so without difficulty by recalling where each guest had sat during the banquet. This experience confirmed for the poet the value of a well-trained memory.

With this story, Dame Frances Yates begins *The Art of Memory,* a provocative history of mnemonics from ancient Greece to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. In Yates's account, the quest for improved memory through artificial mnemonic systems emerges as a critical part of our attempt to organize knowledge and impose an understandable order on a chaotic world. Quintilian, the great first-century Roman rhetorician, explained that in the mnemonic method of *loci* used by Simonides, everything one wished to remember was assigned an image and location in an imaginary building. The sign for each concept—an

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anchor for navigation, a sword for warfare—was mentally placed in a particular room. Reviving the memory was simply a matter of touring the rooms and demanding from each the image that had been deposited there. This method, Yates argues, had a considerable influence on later attempts to organize knowledge. Among its legatees was the sixteenth-century scholar Giulio Camillo, who designed but never completed a Memory Theater—a structure big enough to fit at least two people and furnished with a variety of memory-jogging boxes and pictures. Once inside, the spectators would see before them the expanding history of divine thought, from the first stirrings of life to the creation of the noble arts, expressed in carefully selected images of planets and gods. The proper juxtaposition of these images, like the ancient art of storing things-to-be-remembered in imaginary locations, would, according to Camillo, "keep the mind awake and move the memory."

The importance of mnemonic systems waned with the development of printing, which made the transmission of written information much more efficient and, in effect, eliminated the need for memories crowded with images and *loci.* Nevertheless, we remain every bit as obsessed with memory as Simonides and Camillo, though today we are more likely to focus on our lack of it, especially where words are concerned. Unlike our predecessors, we are required to remember our zip codes, telephone numbers, fax numbers, Social Security numbers, and PIN numbers, but few of us could imagine being able to recite a book of the *Iliad* "by heart." The very expression implies a kind of deeply personal commitment to—one might even say love of—the task that most of us would find foreign. And perhaps this modern resistance to memorization masks an anxiety caused by a diminished sense of our own mnemonic capabilities.

But these are busy times, we insist; the world is complicated and we are inundated with information as never before. So instead of straining our own frail memories, we arm ourselves with an array of elaborate external *aides-memoires:* Rolodexes, Filofaxes, Palm Pilots, and, of course, computers. Such aids have existed in one form or another throughout written culture, and, according to the psychologist Merlin Donald, their growing use is evidence that the locus of memory itself has left our individual, biological memories and is now part of an "accumulating external memory network."

And why not? It was, after all, advancements in memory technology that facilitated our progression from the hulking "electronic brains" of the 1940s to our sleek, shrinking laptops. When computers were finally equipped with memory in the 1940s, they relied on such clunky and imperfect methods of data storage as acoustic delay lines and cathode-ray tubes. Now, thanks to the transistor and the silicon chip, the computer has radically diminished in both size and price. In 1965, the semiconductor pioneer Gordon Moore predicted that the number of transistors con-

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tained on a computer chip—and hence its processing power—would double every eighteen months. "Moore's Law," as his prediction has come to be known, has held true (though its continuity has lately been questioned by a researcher at Intel, the company Moore co-founded). The development of hard-drive data storage has proceeded along similar lines. A person buying a PC in 1990 might have chosen one with twenty to forty megabytes of storage; today, the choice would more likely be between four and eight gigabytes—a capacity two hundred times as great. In the mid-1980s, a megabyte of hard-drive storage cost about $5.50; today it can sell for as little as two cents. But it has become almost an axiom that there is never enough memory: as files and software become bigger and bigger—Windows 2000, for instance, contains up to twenty-nine million lines of code, about thirteen million more than Windows NT 4.0—so does our need for larger and cheaper storage and ever quicker access to data.

Given the technical prowess of such external memory networks, our own ability to memorize facts is now less important than our ability to wade through electronically filed information or conduct an efficient online search. Faced with sound bites and fleeting images, we may be reassured by the imagined permanence and reliability of external forms of memory—in museums, in monuments, and certainly in computers. They promise a sense of order and reliability that our own brittle, fading memories no longer afford us. But by placing the burden of remembering outside ourselves, have we not effectively relinquished control over one of the processes most central to developing our individual identities? This question assumes a greater urgency in light of the Y2K problem, which, even if it does not, as some have predicted, lead to economic recession or the disruption of vital social services, nonetheless represents a possible memory crisis of existential proportions.

Any computer user has experienced that dark moment when the screen freezes and the system "crashes." The important document—for even if it didn't seem important before you lost it, it has instantly become indispensable and unimaginably brilliant—is frozen, unreachable, beyond control. Even the most experienced technophile, expert in the ways of complicated data retrieval, is likely to have a moment of knee-jerk panic. Maybe it's nothing . . . but what if it isn't? You have trusted your computer; it is not just an optional accoutrement but an essential enabler. To be a connected, integrated human in turn-of-the-millennium America means to have access to the right information—and when your computer crashes, that access disappears in a millisecond.

Whenever I read about people's reactions to the computer problems we are to expect at 12:00 A.M., January 1, 2000, I am reminded of the conflicting feelings generated by any personal computer crash: feigned indifference, fear, outrage. By now everyone knows about Y2K, a potential memory

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wipeout that originated in the desire to save memory—that is, the attempt to save computer memory space by listing years as two-digit numbers. We have read that city governments across the United States are spending more than one hundred million dollars to make public works and municipal computer systems Y2K compliant; that basic services—water, electricity, gas—could be cut off when the microprocessors that direct them confront the date change; that banks could lose deposits and ATMs refuse to dispense cash. People have stockpiled food and ammunition in preparation for possible rioting and mayhem, perhaps in response to the Red Cross's suggestion that people prepare for Y2K as they would for any natural disaster. Some self-declared experts suggest keeping paper copies of financial and medical records, since the electronic proof of our existence may be erased or inaccurate. "What Will Become of Us?" asks one book in the burgeoning new genre of Y2K preparedness. "VISUALIZE TOTAL VULNERABILITY. THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF THE Y2K CRISIS," declares another.

In the great betrayal that is Y2K, that which was supposed to augment our capacity for organizing and analyzing information, for making sense of the world, has revealed itself to be out of our control and capable of harming us. As the computer programmer Ellen Ullman wrote in *Wired* magazine, "After being told for years that technology is the path to a highly evolved future, it's come as something of a shock to discover that a computer system is not a shining city on a hill—perfect and ever new—but something more akin to an old farmhouse built bit by bit over decades by nonunion carpenters." Faced with the possibility that our external memories could be taken away from us, leaving us with our underdeveloped personal memories, we are reminded of what we have unwittingly forgotten. Saint Augustine once conferred upon Memory the honor of being one of the three powers of the soul, the reflection of the Trinity in man. Did we give it away for safekeeping, only to lose it?

It should come as no surprise that, against the background of general millennial anxiety, Y2K has assumed a position of unusual prominence. Its very banality makes it all the more troubling. If a computer error can send millions of gallons of untreated sewage into a Los Angeles recreation area (as happened last summer), Y2K—something associated not metaphorically or arbitrarily but *actually* with the coming of the new millennium—could wreak far more tangible havoc than the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. And for those who prefer divine interpretations, Y2K seems the perfect comeuppance for a society that has willfully traded the partnership of God and man for the partnership of man and machine. The Reverend Jerry Falwell likens the Y2K problem to the myth of the Tower of Babel, whose builders God punished for their presumption by making their words mutually incomprehensible. He explains, "God doesn't like what He sees. He may be preparing to confound our lan-

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guage, to jam our communications, to scatter our efforts and judge us for our sin and rebellion against His lordship."

From the beginning, the man-machine partnership was cemented in a belief in the potential of computers, not simply as number-crunching machines but as means for augmenting human intellect, including memory. In 1945, Vannevar Bush, Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development during World War II, published an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* on how a computing machine could overcome what he believed to be the greatest challenge confronting modern man: the information glut that prevented him from adequately accessing the record of human achievement and ideas. Bush called his machine a "memex" because it was to be "an enlarged intimate supplement to memory" that would both remove the drudgery from human thinking and, by mechanizing the process of association involved with memory work, expand the horizons of mental experience. It would be a desklike machine with multiple viewing screens, a keyboard, and an array of buttons and levers. Printed materials were to be stored on microfilm, images entered through Polaroid-style photography. Any two items in the memex could be permanently coded for an associative selection or "trail," which, Bush explained, was analogous to the trail of mental associations in the user's mind. Unlike human mental associations, however, trails in the memex would not fade over time. Like Giulio Camillo's Memory Theater, Bush's memex was never constructed. However, his *Atlantic* article struck a chord not merely with the public but also with his cybernetic descendants. The computer pioneers of the 1960s—including J. C. R. Licklider, who wrote about the interactive "libraries of the future"; Doug Engelbart, who holds the patent on the computer mouse; and Ted Nelson, who coined the term *hypertext*—all acknowledged the influence of Bush and his memex.

At the same time that Vannevar Bush was worrying about the need to organize and access information, information itself came to be seen as a fundamental building block of the universe, like matter or energy, and a key to understanding reality—thanks largely to the work of Norbert Wiener, the MIT mathematician and father of cybernetics, and Claude Shannon, originator of the field of information theory. At the heart of Wiener's cybernetics was the idea of feedback, or the ability of a machine to use the results of its own performance for self-regulation. All living things practice some form of feedback as they adapt to their environment, Wiener concluded, and thus, as he wrote in 1950, "the nervous system and the automatic machine are fundamentally alike in that they are devices which make decisions on the basis of decisions they have made in the past." Nerves could be explained as all-or-nothing switchlike devices, comparable to relays or vacuum tubes; and in the same way, human memory was little more than stored information. Thus, Wiener

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argued, psychological disorders such as manic-depression or paranoia or even schizophrenia could be understood simply as "diseases of memory," arising from instability in the circulation of information. "To live effectively," he wrote, "is to live with adequate information."

As computers and humans became more thoroughly linked, a growing interest developed in the possible interrelationship or even interchangeability of the two. The neurologist Oliver Sacks recalls reading these breakthrough scientific papers with great excitement and thinking, as many did at the time, "that we were on the verge of computer translation, perception, cognition; a brave new world in which ever more powerful computers would be able to mimic, and even take over, the chief functions of brain and mind." Scientists began using phrases like "man-computer symbiosis" and even suggested that one day computer memories would be made not of magnetic materials but of substances similar to those found in the human brain. The danger with reducing everything to information, of course, is that one is inevitably left with an impoverished sense of the human. (What are we to make of the fact that in 1983, *Time* magazine named the computer Man of the Year?) Bush and Wiener both worried about this. Bush emphasized in his later writings those powers he believed to be uniquely human—emotional judgment, spirituality, art. Wiener saw the new technology as a force for either good or evil. On the positive side, for example, high-tech prosthetic devices could replace human sensory or motor functions that had been lost or weakened. Wiener himself helped invent a prosthetic arm for amputees that could be controlled directly by the wearer's nerve impulses. Plagued by myopia and fearing eventual blindness, he tried to prepare himself for life as a kind of "cyborg" composed of both human and mechanical parts. But Wiener also recognized that machines could be used by some to manipulate many, and warned that the "danger to society is not from the machine itself but from what man makes of it."

We are unlikely to see an end to the criticism that certain new technologies strip us of the kinds of sensory, emotional, and psychological responses that make us human. Writing, that seemingly benign practice whose demise in the age of e-mail has reduced many a sensitive viewer of recent Jane Austen films to wistful nostalgia, was, after all, denounced by Plato in the *Phaedrus* as a discovery that would "create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories, they will trust to the external written characters." In 1968, Erich Fromm declared that by the year 2000, humans would cease to be humans, having been reduced to mere cogs in the production machine. More recently, the Unabomber warned that the "technophiles are taking us all on an utterly reckless ride into the unknown," while a contributor to a Christian web site worried that Satan might invade people's homes "with a demonic flood through the information superhighway." Norbert Wiener foresaw this ambivalence

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when he wrote of Prometheus—who rendered a great service to humanity but defied nature in doing so—as the prototype of the scientist. It was Dr. Frankenstein, Mary Shelley's own Modern Prometheus, who lamented, "How dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge."

The discussion of man-computer synergy continues to this day, as does the lingering influence of the computer-brain analogy. Sigmund Freud's reference, in an 1896 letter to his friend Wilhelm Fliess, to memory as "*rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances" is reminiscent of Wiener's notion of feedback. This idea would later be elaborated on and given biological backing by the neuroscientist Gerald Edelman, who argued that memory results from a complicated and unavoidably "inexact" process of "continual *recategorization*" as the neuronal groups that gather perceptual information react and reconfigure according to the changing context. Increasingly, the very complexity and contingency of memory have shifted the way we think about both the brain and the computer. As early as the 1930s, the psychologist Frederic Bartlett determined that memory could not be reduced to a simple mechanism of reproduction but rather was shaped in the act of recalling or retelling. "Remembering," he wrote, "is not the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is the imaginative reconstruction, or construction built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organized past reactions or experience."

But instead of reveling in the uncertainty and complication of memory—the very humanness of it—we are made anxious by its vulnerability. We have recently learned that memory is susceptible to corruption or distortion by suggestive influences, by the retrieval cues we are given, and by our own unconscious needs or desires. We hear of fantastic errors in eyewitness testimonies; we read about the rash of recovered memory cases in the early 1990s in which children "remembered"—often falsely—that they had been sexually assaulted or inducted into Satanic circles by their parents. It has never been so clear that this memory of ours is fleeting, inconsistent, and inexact. And it has also never been so clear that the computer, which was designed to be permanent, consistent, and exact, is only as reliable as the humans who programmed it.

While some have turned to the story of the Tower of Babel to explain Y2K, an even more appropriate metaphor might be Jorge Luis Borges's Library of Babel. Composed of an indefinite number of hexagonal galleries containing all the books that have ever been written, which together contain everything that can be expressed in all languages, this library is a metaphor for the limits or infinities of knowledge and for the human urge to uncover them. But in Borges's story, the hope of accessing the entire library, of finding nothing short of the "clarification of the basic mysteries of humanity," leads inevitably to depression, for "the cer-

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tainty that some shelf in some hexagon contained precious books and that these books were inaccessible seemed almost intolerable." Nonetheless, the search itself, futile and painful though it is, lends an order to the library; and so it is with our hunger for knowledge. One can see this in the very formulation of the concept of the millennium, a project that offers, as Stephen Jay Gould puts it, a view of "the great mental strategies that we use to wrest order and meaning from a recalcitrant world." Memory Theater or memex, libraries of the future or World Wide Web—these are all designed to capture and clarify what we can know about the world. They are also designed to free us to pursue loftier tasks. Vannevar Bush understood this when he carefully distinguished between the "essentially repetitive thought" that could be done by a machine and the "creative thought" for which there was no mechanical substitute.

And something memorized by a computer is not the same as something memorized by a human being. Even as we joke about being unable to remember where we left our keys, we are fascinated by stories about mnemonic prodigies like the Greek statesman Themistocles, who, in the fifth century B.C., is said to have been able to call by name all twenty thousand citizens of Athens. The sixteenth-century Dutch philologist Joseph Scaliger memorized all of Homer in three weeks. And his Flemish contemporary Justus Lipsius so completely absorbed the works of Tacitus that he confidently invited all comers to stab him with a dagger if, on being asked to recite any passage verbatim, he failed to do so flawlessly. (He remained intact.) The Sony PCG-F270 laptop on my desk could perform all those feats of memory without even trying, but who would be impressed? Yet if a person today did anything analogous, who wouldn't be?

It is no small thing to feel so connected to the tales one has heard and the books one has read that one feels compelled to commit them to memory. Especially now, when we seem to have so little control over the glut of information that surrounds us and over the machines that would manage this information for us, we might do well to focus occasionally on some tiny fraction of information—chosen by us rather than imposed on us, and well within our locus of control—by learning something "by heart." As John Hollander explains in the introduction to *Committed to Memory,* an anthology of one hundred poems to memorize, learning a poem is very different from simply reading a poem. When the rhythms of the waves at Dover Beach or the brave recollections of Ulysses remain inside you long after you have closed the book, you have incorporated something important. When all the information in our lives seems to be crashing down around our heads (not unlike the building that collapsed on Simonides' unfortunate dinner companions), we could do worse than enter the next millennium armed with a few small fragments of knowledge that through practice and patience we have committed to memory.

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The Triumph of the Stage Direction

KEVIN JACKSON

The flames immediately flare up so that the fire fills the entire space in front of the hall and appears to seize on the building itself. Horrified, the men and women press to the very front of the stage. When the whole stage seems to be engulfed in flames, the glow suddenly subsides, so that soon all that remains is a cloud of smoke which drifts away to the back of the stage, settling on the horizon as a layer of dark cloud. At the same time the Rhine overflows its banks in a mighty flood, surging over the conflagration. . . .

Wagner's terminal instructions for *Götterdämmerung,* first staged in 1876, would appear to mark the extreme limit of what any dramatist could reasonably hope to put on the boards, short of wiring up the auditorium with dynamite and blasting the pit, the stalls, and the circle to smithereens. Yet from the Rhine-sodden ashes of Valhalla and earth rose not only new styles of drama but new ways of putting dramatic writing onto the page. All the standard reference books will tell you that the period between 1870 and 1920 or thereabouts was a golden age for drama, jeweled with the names of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Wilde, and Shaw. Few take the trouble to point out that this was also the golden age of the stage direction, which, egged on by Shaw's revolutionist incitement, suddenly declined to serve its traditional role as an anonymous, self-effacing flunkey of the play's dialogue. It started to throw its weight around. It showed that it could dish out polemic as if it

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were a muckraking pamphlet or, more exactly, a Shavian preface (the first few pages of a Shaw play tend to be crammed with the author's opinions, as if his preface had burst its banks, Rhine-wise, and flooded onto the stage); wax didactic like a lecturer; rhapsodize over scenery like a nature poet; and anatomize character like a novelist. Though Shaw is valued mostly as a realistic writer today, he was also happy to write stage directions of transcendently Wagnerian scope, as he did in *Back to Methuselah*:

> *They contemplate the void with awe. Organ music of the kind called sacred in the nineteenth century begins. Their awe deepens. The violet ray, now a diffused mist, rises again from the abyss . . .*

(Justice also demands mention of a much funnier direction from *Methuselah: "The Garden of Eden. Afternoon."*) The author of *The Perfect Wagnerite* had plainly learned a thing or two about stage directions from Bayreuth; the author of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* also bowed respectfully toward Norway, where Ibsen had been dreaming up catastrophic finales for years—not quite as cosmic as Wagner's Teutonized Ragnarök but, in a good production, every bit as emotionally intense:

> *The ladies on the veranda wave their pocket-handkerchiefs, and the shouts of "Hurrah" are taken up in the streets below. Then they are suddenly silenced, and the crowd bursts out into a shriek of horror. A human body, with planks and fragments of wood, is vaguely perceived crashing down behind the trees.*

A shattering moment, and, if one turns a deaf ear to those shouts of "Hurrah," all achieved without a single character uttering a single word. The plummeting form in Ibsen's *The Master Builder* is a feat of dramaturgy that anticipates some of the defining, dialogue-free coups of twentieth-century drama, from the silent scream of Brecht's *Mother Courage* to the terrifying hoovering-in-the-dark of Pinter's *Caretaker* to the camp Annunciation (very Steven Spielberg) at the end of Tony Kushner's *Millennium Approaches*.

And yet . . . all right, I'd better own up to puerility, philistinism, and probably worse by confessing that I find it hard to read this scene from *The Master Builder* without smirking. Not, I nervously add, because the image is silly in itself, but because it's all too easy to imagine the disasters of a less than perfect production, in which the falling body is either an obvious dummy or an intrepid stuntman who ricochets back from his trampoline into the audience's view (isn't this supposed to have happened at a performance of *Tosca?*), or in which the whole set, battered by flying planks, falls inexorably to pieces while the stage manager commits *seppuku* in the wings. The more spectacular the stage action, the greater

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the potential for a really superlative cock-up. The great innovators—the Wagner of *Götterdämmerung,* the Ibsen of *The Master Builder,* and the Shaw of *Back to Methuselah*—were all daring in more than the once-familiar sense: they were willing to risk the bathos that lurks, grinning evilly, in all-too-fallible props and sets.

It's easy to see, though, why they were willing to take the risk. As the theater critic Michael Billington was good enough to explain to me, the triumph of the stage direction at the end of the nineteenth century is in large measure a consequence of the rise of naturalism and of the author's wish to control not only a play's spoken words but also its shapes, sounds, and sights. (Or even, on rare occasions, its smells. I recall the enthusiasm with which a friend of mine responded to the Royal Court production of *Tom and Viv,* Michael Hastings's play about T. S. Eliot's ghastly first marriage. The moment at which Eliot is received into the Anglican communion was rendered sensuous by the burning of incense. How refreshing, my friend thought, to let that unintellectual organ, the nose, be the first to apprehend Eliot's conversion!)

The composition of highly specific directions was, Mr. Billington suggests, a way for the writer to seize back control from the director—witness Chekhov's row with Stanislavsky when the director took it into his head to introduce the noise of croaking frogs into a passage that in the dramatist's text was wholly free of batrachians. It is hard for audiences made blasé by a century of cinema to appreciate quite how remarkable it was for playwrights to conceive a school of drama in which the play's emotional force might be brought to focus in its stage directions: the slamming of the door in *A Doll's House,* say, or, most terrible and haunting of all, the finale of *The Cherry Orchard:*

> *A sound is heard that seems to come from the sky, like a breaking harp-string, dying away mournfully. All is still again, and there is nothing heard but the strokes of the axe far away in the orchard.*

I am, of course, exaggerating the radical novelty of such effects just a hair. Many, if not most, playwrights from Aeschylus onward had written with a view to the kinds of emotional effects particular sights or actions or noises or groupings of characters would have on the audience; and, after all, the most famous stage direction in literary and theatrical history comes not from Ibsen or Chekhov or Shaw but from Shaw's bête noire ("With the single exception of Homer, there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I can despise so entirely"), William Shakespeare:

> *Exit, pursued by a bear.*

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The scholarly consensus seems to be that it is quite okay to laugh at that one (*The Winter's Tale,* Act III, scene iii), because Jacobean and Elizabethan audiences always considered bear scenes a great hoot. It's also quite possible that the Bard would have been happy to hear laughter, albeit horrid laughter, at his early anticipation of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* in *Titus Andronicus,* Act II, scene iv:

> *Enter the empress' sons, with* LAVINIA, *her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out, and ravish'd.*

As one of my schoolteachers remarked, the problem of how to make Lavinia's state of ravishment visible to the audience has always taxed the taste and intelligence of directors. My favorite Shakespearean stage direction is rather more tasteful, and comes at the end of an unusually copious note in *Timon of Athens,* Act I, scene ii:

> *Hautboys playing loud music. A great banquet serv'd in; and then enter* LORD TIMON, *Athenian Lords and Senators,* VENTIDIUS *which Timon redeem'd from prison;* LUCULLUS *and* ALCIBIADES. *Steward and others in attendance. Then comes, dropping after all,* APEMANTUS, *discontentedly, like himself.*

(On APEMANTUS's behalf, it must be said that not only did he come like himself, he *came*—which is more than can be said for the final character in *"Enter Prine, Leonato, Claudio and Jacke Wilson,"* in *Much Ado About Nothing,* who doesn't appear in the scene, or indeed anywhere else in the play.)

"Excellent examples," comments *Timon*'s Arden editor, H. J. Oliver, "of the 'descriptive' stage directions which show that the author's draft (or a transcript of it) was 'copy' for the printed text." Possibly, maybe probably; but, reluctant as I am to take so much as the smallest issue with the learned Doctor Oliver, the sorry fact is that we have no way of determining which, if any, of the stage directions we have received from the First Folio and other early editions are direct from Shakespeare's pen, and which are lifted from promptbooks and the like. True, it does seem likely that, as Shakespeare distanced himself more and more from London and the practical world of the theater, he made some attempt to control his productions from a distance by writing his ideas and wishes into his scripts, which is why Shakespearean directions start to wax more eloquent from, roughly, *Coriolanus* onward. Yet even this much is conjectural, and, barring the miraculous recovery of manuscripts or the intervention of spiritualists, we will never be certain that Shakespeare wrote any of the stage directions, with or without bears and Jacke Wilson, that our most sober editions continue to reprint. Shaw, you may recall, liked to set himself up against the Swan of Avon in *Shakes. v. Shav.* matches. Usually

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Shav. ends up looking fairly preposterous, but when it comes to the Stage Directions heat, we're obliged to concede that Shakes. isn't even a starter, let alone a contender.

Concessions duly made, I resume my untroubled dogmatism. By the turn of the twentieth century, the theatrical revolution known as naturalism was triumphant, so much so that the formerly downtrodden script-paratext not only enjoyed a real measure of equality with the dialogue, but in some cases—such as the plays of J. M. Barrie—actually became the dominant part. Or, as the theatrical historian J. C. Trewin wrote of Barrie in a rather less excitable metaphor, "His plays in printed form are often a trickle of dialogue through a forest of commentary." Fair enough. Take the opening of Barrie's greatest hit, *Peter Pan:*

> *The night nursery of the Darling family, which is the scene of our opening Act, is at the top of a rather depressed street in Bloomsbury. We have a right to place it where we will, and the reason Bloomsbury is chosen is that Mr Roget once lived there. So did we in days when his* Thesaurus *was our only companion in London; and we whom he has helped to wend our way through life have always wanted to pay him a little compliment. The Darlings therefore lived in Bloomsbury . . .*

Now this jolly verbosity, and the rolling acres of agreeably rambling prose that follow it, have absolutely zero to do with naturalism and just about everything to do with the other historical cause of the stage-direction revolution: more and more publishers were finding it attractive to publish editions of works by popular playwrights, which meant that playwrights could feel free, indeed were encouraged, to think in terms of a readership as well as an audience. (And when the playwright was a novelist, failed novelist, or novelist manqué, categories that embrace both Shaw and Barrie, the stage direction was the ideal place to flex the old fiction-writing muscles: *Peter Pan* began life as a novel.) The development had a number of interesting consequences. It led, for example, to the writing of a type of drama that could never be staged, and was intended solely for the mental proscenium of the reader. Sadakichi Hartmann's mystical play *Confucius,* a splendid example of the genre, ended with the italicized words *"The New Era of Mankind Begins to Sense Its Way."*

Somewhat closer to the mainstream, there was Hardy's *The Dynasts* (full title: *The Dynasts: An Epic-Drama of the War with Napoleon, in three parts, nineteen acts, and one hundred and thirty scenes, the time covered by the action being about ten years*). Hardy's 1903 preface to the work frankly described it as "presented to the mind's eye in the likeness of a drama," insisting that it was "intended simply for mental performance, and not for the stage."

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This was a sensible emphasis, as substantial parts of *The Dynasts* are literally unstageable:

> *At once, as earlier, a preternatural clearness possesses the atmosphere of the battlefield, in which the scene becomes anatomised and the living masses of humanity transparent. The controlling Immanent Will appears therein, as a brain-like network of currents and ejections, twitching, interpenetrating, entangling, and thrusting hither and thither the human forms.*

Vile cynics might add that *The Dynasts* is also literarily unstageable, since Hardy's ear for dialogue in this play was not always at its most felicitous:

> SPIRIT SINISTER
> Come, Sprite, don't carry your ironies too far, or you may wake up the Unconscious Itself, and tempt It to let all the gory clock-work of the show run down to spite me!

Surprisingly, plenty of otherwise intelligent people, including Siegfried Sassoon, Ford Madox Ford, and Walter de la Mare, thought *The Dynasts* was tip-top stuff. Astoundingly, among that admiring crowd was Max Beerbohm, something one would never guess from reading "'Savonarola' Brown," one of the stories in *Seven Men,* which ends with a glorious parody of rubbishy historical drama in general and the idiocies of stage directions in particular. Its most sublimely hilarious moment comes at the end of Act III:

> *Re-enter Guelfs and Ghibellines fighting.* SAV. *and* LUC. *are arrested by Papal officers. Enter* MICHAEL ANGELO. ANDREA DEL SARTO *appears for a moment at a window.* PIPPA *passes. Brothers of the Misericordia go by, singing a Requiem for Francesca da Rimini. Enter* BOCCACCIO, BENVENUTO CELLINI, *and many others, making remarks highly characteristic of themselves but scarcely audible through the terrific thunderstorm which now bursts over Florence and is at its loudest and darkest crisis as the Curtain falls.*

In the decades since Beerbohm had SAV. and LUC. arrested, playwrights have tended to become more tight-lipped and rigorous in their approach to directions. (There are, of course, exceptions. The Wingfield apartment in *The Glass Menagerie "faces an alley and is entered by a fire-escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of those large buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation. . . .")* If you wanted to suggest a paradigmatic stage direction for the drama of the later twentieth century, you could hardly do better than "*(Pause.),*" *passim* in early Pinter. It would be lovely to say that the return

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to modesty was a direct result of Beerbohm's spoof, but the real reasons are doubtless to be found elsewhere, above all in the newly thriving cults of the director and designer. Plenty of playwrights are now happy either to collaborate with their creative partners or simply to stand back and let them get on with the squalid task of presenting their texts to the public. In quite a few contemporary playscripts you will find that the printed directions are less an indication of the playwright's ideal vision than a straightforward record of how the play was staged in its first or most profitable run. Which, of course, may be exactly what has been handed down between the lines of Shakespeare.

This is not to say, however, that the history of stage directions has come full circle—centuries of functional scribbles, fifty-odd years of unwonted eloquence, a gradual return to the utilitarian. Slightly closer to the mark would be Marx's comment on the tendency of history to repeat itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. Writers continued to lavish the greatest care and ingenuity on stage directions well after the heyday of GBS, Harley Granville-Barker, and company, but they increasingly did so in search of a laugh.

Beerbohm is one star of this movement, and another is Ring Lardner, who wrote eight or nine so-called Dada (though he was no Dadaist) plays, ripe with demented stage directions. These included *The Tridget of Greva; Dinner Bridge* (much admired by Edmund Wilson, who published it in the *New Republic); Clemo Uti—The Water Lilies* (whose first-act curtain rises on *"the outskirts of a Parcheesi Board"); Cora, or Fun at a Spa* (subtitled *An Expressionist Drama of Love, Death and Sex); Taxidea Americana;* and *Quadroon—A Play in Four Pelts Which May All Be Attended in One Day or Missed in a Group,* a parody of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* that consists in large measure of menus for the ample lunches and dinners to be served between acts. Lardner's three-act drama *I Gaspiri (The Upholsterers),* "Adapted from the Bukovinian of Casper Redmonda," gives a fair idea of the genre. We join the proceedings at the end of Act I:

> *(Three outsiders named Klein go across the stage three times. They think they are in a public library. A woman's cough is heard offstage left.)*
>
> A New Character
>
> Who is that cough?
>
> Two Moors
>
> That is my mother. She died a little while ago in a haphazard way.
>
> A Greek
>
> And what a woman she was!
> *(The curtain is lowered for seven days to denote the lapse of a week.)*

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ACT II

(Deleted by the censor.)

ACT III

(The Lincoln Highway. Two bearded glue lifters are seated at one side of the road. . . .)

One or two critics made fairly large claims for the philosophical dimensions of Lardner's work, though the best theory is that he was just mucking about. Still, it's odd that he isn't cited more frequently as a Yankee precursor of the Theatre of the Absurd, especially since that movement's most enduring genius, Samuel Beckett, has one or two faintly Gaspiri-ish touches in his work and was fond of making genuinely philosophical jokes in his stage directions: look at "Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit"; or at the make-up suggestions for *Rockaby;* or at the sly note about Hodge the Cat in his uncompleted first play, *Human Wishes;* or at the set description for his television play *Ghost Trio* (in which a window is described as *"imperceptibly ajar"*—now there's a challenge to the set designer). Beckett is also, surely, the only great playwright ever to have written at least two plays that consist wholly of brief stage directions—*Act Without Words* and *Breath,* which lasts less than a minute and is peopled by motionless actors strewn around a landscape more devastated than anything in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung.*

Beckett's spare, scrupulous, and astringently witty notations are so far removed from Wagner's gigantism that they might be the product of an entirely different civilization, and yet there is at least one bridge between them, and his name is James Joyce. Beckett worked as a sort of secretary for Joyce, learning a great deal from him about what the art of writing was and might be. Joyce, who idolized Ibsen in his youth but failed (though he tried hard) to emulate his Norwegian master in *Exiles,* went on to write a sustained and searching parody of elaborate stage notations in the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*—and one of his favorite targets was the megalomaniacal grandiloquence of Wagner. My guess is that there's at least one passage in "Circe" that makes fun simultaneously of both *The Ring* and *The Master Builder:*

STEPHEN: Nothung!
(He lifts his ashplant high with both hands and smashes the chandelier. Time's livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry.)

Wagner and Ibsen aren't the only victims Joyce has in mind. "Circe" makes exuberant mock of every visionary playwright who has ever chafed

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against the limitations of the stage and yearned to encompass continents and epochs, lay waste the earth, storm the heavens, and generally try it on a bit:

> *Bloom walks on a net, covers his left eye with his left ear, passes through several walls, climbs Nelson's Pillar, hangs from the top ledge by his eyelids, eats twelve dozen oysters (shells included), heals several sufferers from king's evil, contracts his face so as to resemble many historical personages, Lord Beaconsfield, Lord Byron, Wat Tyler, Moses of Egypt, Moses Maimonides, Moses Mendelssohn, Henry Irving, Rip van Winkle, Kossuth, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Baron Leopold Rothschild, Robinson Crusoe, Sherlock Holmes, Pasteur, turns each foot simultaneously in different directions, bids the tide turn back, eclipses the sun by extending his little finger.*

And there's plenty more where that came from: more than a hundred pages of hallucinatory fun and games. ("Circe" is longer than *Hamlet.*) Massively influential as it was, *Ulysses* alone was not potent enough to mark the end of the lavish stage direction, although anyone who wanted to draw a line across the chronological chart at the exact point when the stage direction's triumphant half-century came to a close could do a lot worse than plump for the novel's publication date, 1922. What Joyce did achieve, among so many other things, was the most brilliantly sustained demonstration of all the effects that prose writers might steal or liberate from the italics of their more successful cousins, the playwrights. But that is a different story, and it is time to lower the curtain.

> JACKSON *leans back in his chair and massages the small of his back, which is giving him gyp. Can he knock off for the day? No. His editor has no mercy.* JACKSON *scuttles to the fridge for a glass of cheap white wine, returns to his chair, and hunts through an untidy mass of notes to make sure he hasn't been misquoting, as usual.*

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Intermission

EDGAR KOERNER

You always saw them at intermission—
Carnegie Hall, Hunter College
Auditorium, the 92nd Street Y—
groups of eight, maybe ten,
their *Wienerisch* German so dissonant
and foreign outside, so right,
so at home in those crowded lobbies,
a coda, always *con brio,*
to the Schubert just played,
a lively prelude to the upcoming
Brahms. It arched above them,
enclosed them. *Na, war das Adagio nicht wunderschön?*
They became their own
homeland, a small teeming island
somewhere between the Vienna
that had wanted to kill them
and the New York in which
they never tried not to be
Viennese. They had their own dentists,
their own restaurants—New York's
Class of Vienna, 1938.
Now,
their island is quickly eroding,
soon to go under completely.
If you see them at all,
it's in twos and threes.

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At intermissions, they lean
on canes, hold on to railings,
their conversations faint echoes
of their earlier echoes.
                Of course,
there are their sons and daughters
who may just remember hide-
and-seek in the *Stadtpark*
but who skipped without stumble
from Gretel to Margaret, Fritz
to Fred, Hans to John. They
now stand in the lobbies and talk
about Roe-Wade, divorces, the Giants,
and, yes, Schubert and Brahms,
until one, slightly older perhaps,
overhears a few words sighed
more than spoken—
                reizend,
nicht? . . . singt wie ein Engel . . .
ja, ja . . . ja, ja—
                even hears in them
something
                that's shattered
by the clanging of bells, lost
in the rush back to the seats,
the glance at the program
to find out what's next.

Edgar Koerner, a retired investment banker, is President of the Children's Aid Society in New York. His poems have appeared in the *Southern Review, Judaism,* and *Poetry East.*

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Starting Out

AMY LOWENSTEIN

In the curtained living room
the projector whirs and once again
those pictures of Jasper, always
good for a laugh. Each time
the room, like a dark forest place
revisited, changes a little. Trees
larger, yes, with new ones struggling up
and some, yet standing, making no sound of leaves.

Again that picture of me, good for a laugh,
mounting a horse for the overnight trip
to the mountains—so gauche, so urban,
everyone screams.
New voices join: There's grandma!
Old ones: Look at those gloves!
Yes, the white gloves, always
good for a laugh, and the children
and their children in the dark
hugging and eating nuts.

And I with you on chairs
above the growth we seeded,
I do not laugh as much. Not that I don't
enjoy being the butt anymore—
I've always played that game—
and not from boredom, but now the scenes
are somehow different.
Look! I want to say. This is important!
Look how young I was. Look! I was young.
I want to say.

Amy Lowenstein, who died in August, was a professor of English at Kean College in Union, New Jersey. Her poetry appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* and other periodicals.

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The Return of the Seagoing Cowboy

Horses Afloat and Books Astray

OWEN GINGERICH

Expositors of chaos theory like to say that the flapping of a butterfly's wings over Kyoto is linked to an Atlantic hurricane three years later. What they mean is that hurricanes are impossible to predict far in advance because the input information required is so complex and vast as to defy any sensible data-gathering techniques. In the public mind, however, an indelible mental picture remains of an unmediated causal chain from lepidopteran to storm, in the sense that I can be held responsible for *Jurassic Park* because I once had Michael Crichton as a student. I hope that the causal links in this memoir are rather stronger. Nevertheless, it has two distinct parts, the butterfly and the tempest.

I

In the wee hours of Thursday morning, June 20, 1946, the SS *Stephen R. Mallory* pulled away from its dock in Newport News, Virginia, on what was to prove a troubled yet memorable voyage.

The *Stephen R. Mallory* was a Liberty ship—one of the cargo ships built for the merchant marine during World War II—similar to the hundreds turned out by the supercontractor Henry J. Kaiser in a successful attempt

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to keep ahead of the German U-boats. But the *Mallory*, built in Panama City and named after the secretary of the Confederate navy, was not an ordinary Liberty ship—it was one of eight double-rigged versions, with booms on each side and especially wide hatches for carrying tanks. Now, barely a year after the end of the war, the *Mallory* had been taken out of mothballs and outfitted for a humanitarian mission under UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency. The construction of hundreds of stalls in the holds and on the top deck had converted the ship into a cattle boat. On Wednesday the ship's wide hatches had allowed the sailors to hoist cattle crates all day long from the docks to the holds.

When the *Mallory* finally sailed on that hot, sultry night, the acrid stench of ammonia was already rising from the cargo in the lower holds: not cows, but 847 horses destined for farm duty in war-torn Poland. I was one of thirty-two cowboys shipping out on that unforgettable journey—the second youngest, an impressionable sixteen-year-old learning about horses close up for the first time, and embarking on an adventure that would shape my career in a way then totally unimaginable. The cowboys had come from small towns in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Kansas, a few from farms, some from colleges, many from high school. None of us had ever crossed the ocean before, aside from Ron Graber, my cousins' cousin, who had been born to missionary parents in India. Ron was the youngest cowboy, just a month past his sixteenth birthday, the threshold for a merchant mariner's card.

Fifty years later, sixteen of us seagoing cowboys held a reunion at a camp in southern Michigan. We were all senior citizens and most of us grandparents. How in the world, we asked ourselves, did so many parents agree to let their teenage sons go off on an indeterminate timetable to foreign parts? The world was different then, of course, since many teenagers had been drafted and sent off to war or, for many of my acquaintances, to Civilian Public Service camps for conscientious objectors. But the question remained. The answer, it seems, was the confidence the parents had in my father, the trip's UNRRA supervisor and the principal recruiter for the crew.

Melvin Gingerich was born on a farm in southeastern Iowa, the eldest child of Mennonite parents. His great-grandfathers had all been Amish bishops. None of his four siblings went to high school, but, inspired by an uncle who became an English professor at the University of Michigan, my father went to college, and then, working part-time during the depression years, completed his doctorate in American social history at the University of Iowa.

While he was in graduate school, he became a frequent lecturer at clubs and churches in the region. I recall that one of his lectures, on portraits of George Washington, greatly offended a local Daughter of the

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American Revolution with the disclosure that, on account of his false teeth, Washington had stuffed cotton in his cheeks for the sitting. Other lectures displeased the school board. My father was both an articulate defender of traditional Mennonite pacifism, and a critic of the hate-mongering preacher Gerald Winrod and his anti-Semitic propaganda. The school board could not have been more pleased when, with a week's notice, my father was offered and accepted an assistant professorship at a small Mennonite college in Kansas. Three months later came Pearl Harbor, and the nation mobilized for war. A few Mennonites went into the army, mostly as noncombatants. Most went as unpaid conscripts into church-supported camps for conscientious objectors, and later into units as orderlies in mental hospitals, work that ultimately hastened mental hospital reform in America. My father visited every camp and every unit, for he had learned that he would become the historian of the Mennonite Civilian Public Service experiment. And that, I suppose, is why he was known, personally or by reputation, to all the parents of the *Stephen R. Mallory*'s seagoing cowboys.

Having a father onboard ship was of course a mixed blessing. I was assigned to one of the upper holds, a great boon because the ventilation was better there than in the deeper holds. My crewmate there was John Keith Miller, whose father would later be my major professor in college. John Keith became hopelessly seasick almost instantly, and because my father didn't want to play favorites by assigning anyone else to help out, I had to feed and water more than eighty horses myself. There were two long aisles in the hold, with a row of horses tied to a long plank on either side of each aisle. When I was filling their water buckets, constant vigilance was required to prevent snappish horses from biting. But who can blame them? Snatched from their bucolic solitude, shipped by rail to a dockside corral, hoisted into a rocking ship, deprived of exercise, forced to stand with strange partners, and balancing ever more precariously as the manure built up under their hind legs, they had every reason to express frustration.

In the first few days, one of our hardest tasks was breaking open the wires around the large bales of hay. The solution to this problem came rather unexpectedly. The *Stephen R. Mallory* was on its maiden voyage as a cattle boat, and after two days at sea, it developed engine trouble. By Sunday night the ship had limped into Boston Harbor. This meant that my father and a few others could go ashore, and one of their gleanings was a good pair of wire cutters. Now I could easily open the bales.

But aboard ship there were more serious problems. Some of the horses were sick, and in the wilting heat and ammoniated atmosphere of the lowest holds, several died of suffocation. The sailors winched the dead animals to the top deck and placed the carcasses in the sun on the roofs of the stalls: it wouldn't have been polite to dump them into Boston

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Harbor. At last, before we were asphyxiated by rotting horseflesh, a garbage scow came to our rescue. Before the repaired ship left, long canvas air funnels were hung between the booms to force fresh air into the lower holds, three levels down near the center of the ship.

All the horses were broodmares—that is, pregnant. A few of the colts were born early, onboard ship. The first, which dropped while we were anchored in Boston, created a sensation among the sailors. The ship's carpenter, who of course was nicknamed Chips, built a special pen for it. Alas, it did not survive the summer heat. The colt was among the sixty-five horses and several colts that we lost during the voyage. Chips took charge of removing the casualties, a process that sometimes had to be repeated several times a day. With a clever system of lines and pulleys, he could extract a half-ton body without any butchering. "Heave easy!" he would bellow to the young men at the winches on deck. ("Eeef eeesi! Eeef eeesi!" it would come out in his heavy Swedish accent.)

The ship had two veterinarians: Dr. Moore, the chief, who was older and kinder, and his brash young Italian assistant, Solar, who seemed to know less about horses than many of the cowboys. When a horse lay down, it was generally a bad sign, and the vets were called. "This horse has a subnormal temperature," the young vet said of one animal that had clearly been dead for several hours. "We'll give him a shot and have him on his feet in a few hours." The story swiftly made the rounds, as gossip must in any such close-quartered environment. "Well," Solar explained when he came down to bawl us out for ridiculing him, "the way the ship was vibrating sure made it look like his nostrils were wiggling."

I'm not sure who intimidated us more, the ship's officers or the vets. The captain, Frank Cronin, once visited our quarters, brandished two pistols, and invoked the possibility of swift justice on the high seas. The vets made unannounced inspections. Once they found a history textbook that I had half hidden among bales of hay. They found such attraction to learning abhorrent and promptly banned all reading material from the holds. Thereafter we hid our books and magazines and developed a secret warning system to hoodwink the vets when they were on tour.

Barely had we left Boston when a generator burned out. Within a day we were on water rationing. Captain Cronin decided to steam ahead, so we settled into a routine of eating, sleeping, and feeding the animals, which was broken only when rough seas splashed waves over the decks and kept some of the cowboys confined to their bunks by seasickness. The hot weather turned cold, and in his diary entry for July 1, my father wrote: "I am in bed with four blankets on me. I decided not to freeze as I did last night." What a time for the refrigerators to go out and force us to finish off all the ice cream!

The next day there was boiler trouble, and Captain Cronin considered heading for the Azores. Whatever the problem, the engineers managed

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to repair it. The assistant engineer said, "There must be Christians on board, or we wouldn't have gotten her fixed." Then someone put salt water in the other boiler. The captain suspected sabotage by a rival shipping line but learned eventually that the culprit was an incompetent second assistant engineer. Several days later, the *Mallory* pulled in at Plymouth, England, to repair the refrigerator, restock provisions, and add anti-mine degaussing equipment. Most of us cowboys finished our work early and took shore leave. It was the first time I had set foot in Europe and the first time I had seen for myself the destruction of war. The center of the city had been smashed by German bombs. I was awed by the roofless parish church of St. Andrews, and I took away a souvenir, a lead leaf from one of the shattered windows.

On the afternoon of Monday, July 8, we sailed from Plymouth on the calmest seas since we had left Newport News. The next afternoon we passed the impressively high cliffs of Dover, with the chorus of the forties' hit song running through our heads: "There'll be bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover / Tomorrow, just you wait and see." The seas were calm, but our adventures were far from over. We entered the Kiel Canal late Wednesday evening, the countryside readily visible in the long summer twilight. Passage through the canal required a German pilot, but Captain Cronin would extend no civilities. Declining to shake hands, he turned his back and retired to his quarters. Crossing the Baltic generally required a German pilot as well, and this the captain refused outright. As a result, we got lost in the worst minefield that remained from World War II. Our ship's degaussing system made it less magnetically vulnerable, but the experience was still nerve-racking. We inched our way through the minefield, with anxious sailors at the prow of the ship scanning the waters with binoculars. I recall standing near the stern of the ship, watching the wake, when the ship abruptly made a hard right turn. We rushed to the starboard side to see what was going on and, to our amazement, saw a mine float past that had apparently been directly in our path. This was not the only mine we saw that day, but it remains one of my most haunting memories from the entire trip.

By July 12, just over three weeks after we had left Newport News, the *Stephen R. Mallory* dropped anchor in Nowy Port, the alternative port that the Poles had developed when Danzig was made a free city after World War I. Soon the horses were being off-loaded by underequipped Polish dockworkers, who were grateful even for the manure. Our responsibilities as cowboys were nearly over—all that remained was to clean the Augean stables on the trip back—and now it was time for shore leave.

For nearly all of us previously well-sheltered cowboys, the trip was our first encounter with the world's seamy underside. It had seemed wonderfully risqué to learn to play pool at the Catholic Maritime Club, where we stayed in Newport News while awaiting assignment to a ship. But Newport

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News hardly prepared us for the ship's sailors, hardened young men not much older than we, whose vocabulary was salted with the f-word, used several times in every sentence and often creatively inserted mid-word, in participial form. They were obsessed with sex in every waking moment and probably in every dreaming moment as well.

But this was nothing compared with what we encountered in war-demoralized Poland. I don't recall seeing prostitutes on the docks, but there were plenty of pimps, whose graphic gesturing easily overcame the sailors' language barrier. A city built of bricks makes for spectacular ruins, and they were everywhere. Colorful flowers abounded and streetcars were running, but Danzig was in a shambles. When I returned twenty-five years later, I could recognize nothing apart from the dock area itself.

Before embarking in Newport News, we had pledged not to indulge in black-market currency. Upon arriving in Poland, Doc Solar offered to help us get currency at something better than the legal rate, two hundred zlotys to the dollar. Fortunately, everyone was hesitant, for the realities of the port were quite different. Ten American dollars or two cartons of cigarettes could buy a good pair of binoculars. But few of us had much cash, and none of us had cigarettes. However, those who made purchases got in change such a fistful of zlotys that Doc Solar's offer seemed ridiculous. He was furious when no one exchanged money with him. We suspected that he had planned to make a financial killing from us naïve cowboys but had been stuck with bundles of worthless Polish currency instead.

Al Meyer, my third cousin from Ohio, struck out with several other cowboys to pick up souvenirs on a nearby battlefield. Among the wrecked tanks he lifted a helmet and was startled to find a skull in it. Two days later, perhaps to keep us out of mischief, Captain Cronin arranged a launch to take us to the site where the first shots of World War II had been fired. The area was still mined, and we proceeded with care. After our return to the ship, the first mate made an inspection tour of our quarters and rounded up a cache of live ammunition collected by my friends. It all went overboard. Seeing the ruins and the battlefields, the prostitution and the black markets born out of destruction and poverty, made a lasting impression on me. It vividly reinforced my previously theoretical abhorrence of war and gave me great sympathy for the plight of the Polish people.

The trip home did not lack further adventures. Some of the sailors had contracted venereal disease during shore leave, but the penicillin supply had mysteriously disappeared. A couple of cowboys who had helped clear the refrigerator when it broke down were questioned. In the end no blame was assigned, but we cowboys had no trouble believing that the vets had sold it on the Polish black market. At one point Doc Solar stormed into our quarters and threatened to sue anyone who gave a bad

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report on him to the Brethren Service Commission, which managed the program for UNRRA. I have no idea if he was able to sign on for another voyage.

We were granted an unexpected touristic bonus on the return trip when we stopped for six days in Copenhagen for boiler repair. I was already an avid amateur astronomer, so Al Meyer and I paid a visit to the Copenhagen Observatory. There we met Julie Vinter Hansen, the director of the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams, which alerted the world to newly discovered comets. I could never have guessed that eighteen years later I would bring that bureau to the Smithsonian Observatory and succeed her as its director.

On August 10, we reached Newport News. I got a haircut and ate an entire quart of ice cream.

II

Fifty years passed. We held our golden anniversary reunion. A few of the cowboys had become farmers; some, including our reunion organizer, Don Zook, had become pastors and missionaries; others were administrators or teachers. Al Meyer got a doctorate in physics from Princeton and has served as an educational theoretician for the Mennonite Church. Byron Bender, who married my first cousin, studied Micronesian grammar and became chairman of the University of Hawaii's linguistics department. Ed Metzler, who introduced me to my wife when he brought her to look through my telescope one night, headed the Peace Corps in India and later served as the head of the United Missions in Nepal. Dale Hostetler, whose career in sports was cut short by an injury, became a physical therapist who accompanied Bob Hope on ten round-the-world trips. Ron Graber, our youngest cowboy, spent most of his life working at a medical clinic in rural Puerto Rico. Richard Siemens, a Kansas schoolmate of mine, also became a physician. In 1959, while he was interning at the Marine Hospital in Seattle, he was called to examine two badly sunburned sailors who had spent several days on a life raft after being shipwrecked in the Mediterranean. They had been on the crew of a Liberty ship that had just split wide open. Intrigued, he asked them if they had ever heard of the *Stephen R. Mallory*. "We sure have," they replied. "That was the ship we were on when it sank!"

While I was writing this account, a *Boston Globe* reporter came to interview me about a Leonardo da Vinci exhibition at the Boston Museum of Science. As he was leaving, I remarked that I had to get back to writing about my youthful experiences as a seagoing cowboy. He reached again for his tape recorder, remarking that he liked to include such unrelated details. "Curiously enough," I told him, "Leonardo *isn't* unrelated." My

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scholarly interest in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is directly connected to that fateful voyage half a century ago.

In 1964, when I was at the International Astronomical Union meeting in Hamburg and was arranging to take over the Central Bureau of Astronomical Telegrams, I described the circumstances of my 1946 cattle-boat trip to a Polish astronomer, Jerzy Dobrzycki. Intrigued, Dobrzycki made a point of inviting me to the International History of Science Congress, to take place in Poland the following summer. At that time I was pursuing a career in stellar astrophysics, working in the vanguard of astronomical computing, but I was also increasingly interested in astronomical history. Well, I thought, why not use my computational skills to prepare a paper on Johannes Kepler's early calculations? Thus I returned to Poland.

In the course of its history, Poland has had relatively few international cultural heroes—Copernicus, Chopin, Marie Curie, Paderewski, Pope John Paul II. Copernicus loomed large in Poland in 1965, with the five hundredth anniversary of his birth forthcoming in 1973. I soon found myself on the international committee to plan appropriate celebrations for the Copernican quinquecentennial. As the year approached, I kept wondering if there would be anything new to say about Copernicus—after all, his work had already been researched for several centuries. In 1970 I took a sabbatical from the Smithsonian Observatory, and our family headed to England. In November we scheduled a trip to Scotland, and en route I conferred with a fellow member of the Copernicus committee. Copernicus's opus magnum, *De revolutionibus*, published in 1543, was such a formidable treatise, we agreed, that its readers throughout all the sixteenth century are probably outnumbered by those who have studied it in great books programs such as the one at St. John's College, where it is required reading. Arthur Koestler—noting in *The Sleepwalkers* that its early readers, like its later ones, were dismayed by its "supreme unreadability"—branded it "the book nobody read." We thought we could count the sixteenth-century readers on the fingers of two hands.

Two days later I was in Edinburgh. At the Royal Observatory I found a first edition of *De revolutionibus* that was handsomely and perceptively annotated from beginning to end. Considering how few sixteenth-century readers there were, this was of course unexpected; but it soon occurred to me that the book might have been annotated by one of the astronomers on our short list, and this proved to be the case. The author of the marginalia was Erasmus Reinhold, professor of mathematics at Wittenberg and the leading astronomical teacher in the generation immediately following Copernicus. His comments revealed a man who was thoroughly intrigued by the technical details of Copernicus's treatise, yet who virtually ignored the cosmological implications of the revolutionary heliocentric framework. Reinhold's marginal explications confirmed what we had suspected of those sixteenth-century astronomers, who were

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just beginning to come to terms with potential scriptural conflicts. Psalm 104, for example, declares that God laid the foundation of the earth that it not be moved forever: surely a geocentric credo. To a later generation, Kepler would claim the verse as a testimony to God's faithfulness in creating a stable environment for our lives, rather than as a scientific text. But in the 1540s such an interpretation was not yet on the table, and heliocentrism was widely regarded simply as a mathematical hypothesis, something astronomers were accustomed to use without claims to physical reality.

I found Reinhold's marginal annotations so interesting that I soon decided to search for marginal notes in other copies of *De revolutionibus* to see what could be learned about the slow reception of Copernicus's ideas. In 1970 I would undoubtedly have considered it preposterous if anyone had assured me that twenty-nine years later I would still be adding new finds to the list I have compiled of more than 270 copies of the first edition and nearly 320 of the second.

In the intervening years, I have crisscrossed Europe and America looking for *De revolutionibus*; examined copies in China and Australia; and written a dozen major papers on aspects of the research, including an extensive survey of the success, or lack thereof, of the Roman censorship imposed by the Inquisition in 1620 as part of the Galileo affair. I have seen the copies that belonged to Galileo, Giordano Bruno, Kepler, his teacher Michael Maestlin, and many others. And after a decade of research, I knew that Arthur Koestler had been dead wrong in describing *De revolutionibus* as the book nobody read.

Of all the odd turns my *De revolutionibus* research has taken over the years, one stands out, if only because it would be so thoroughly at home in a third-rate detective story—and because it took me back once again to Poland. One day in the early 1980s, as I was looking at slides on my light table at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, I noticed the initials "EWL" on the title page of the 1507 *Almanach nova*, a book by the German astronomers Stoeffler and Pflaum, which I had previously photographed in Wroclaw, the former German Breslau.

Those initials and that name rang a bell, because I knew that the copy of *De revolutionibus* inherited by Kepler had originally been given by the book's Nuremberg printer to a local physician, Jerome Schreiber, who wrote his name on the title page. After Kepler, an unidentified owner had added his own initials, EWL, in fancy script. Now I was looking at another book that had apparently been owned by the same two men. Between Schreiber and EWL, could this Wroclaw volume also have been owned by Kepler, who seldom inscribed his own books? And if so, might there be other volumes in Wroclaw that had once been owned by Kepler, whose library seems to have vanished with scarcely a trace?

In 1984, I had an opportunity to return to Wroclaw, and I spent the better part of a day writing out call slips for every sixteenth-century as-

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tronomy title I could think of that might have been in Kepler's library. One minor detail bothered me: I couldn't find in the catalogue a card for Rheticus's *Narratio prima.* Rheticus had been Copernicus's sole disciple, and his *Narratio prima,* published three years before *De revolutionibus,* contained the first printed report of the new heliocentric cosmology. A few months earlier, the only known copy still in private hands had been auctioned in New York for four hundred thousand dollars. This astronomical price had the effect of bringing another copy out of the woodwork. Friends in the book trade asked if I knew anything about "the house of Mary Magdalene," because a copy of *Narratio prima* that had mysteriously turned up for sale in Paris included the Latin stamp "Aed Maria Magd." I didn't; we could only conclude that it was an obscure and long-defunct library.

Since I had seen the *Narratio prima* on my previous visit to the Wroclaw library and still had its call number, I included it on the list of books to be fetched even though I hadn't found the card in the catalogue. After some hours I had before me a huge array of books, about a hundred titles. The good news was that hidden deep inside the volume with the initials EWL and the signature of Jerome Schreiber—the book whose title page, on my light table, had occasioned such excitement—was a whole page of Kepler's comments, previously unknown. Not only had he owned it, he had written extensively in it! The bad news was that there were no other books with a Keplerian provenance. However, I kept finding book after book with the stamp "Aed Maria Magd." It looked as if I was close to the source of the clandestine copy of the *Narratio prima* being offered for sale in Paris.

I was disconcerted when the *Narratio prima* was not among the cartload of volumes that I had requested. As I left for lunch, I drew this curious omission to the librarian's attention. When I returned in the afternoon, his face was ashen. The bound volume that supposedly contained the *Narratio prima,* among other brief treatises, had in fact been fetched for me—but Rheticus's small tract was missing, carefully removed from the collection and its loss cleverly concealed by pressing the volume tightly together, and of course by removing its card from the catalogue. While I was at lunch, the librarian had gone back through the records to the previous time the volume had been fetched, and had then looked up the other books that had been called for on that occasion. Two other tracts turned out to be missing as well.

"Let me guess," I said. "One is Copernicus's small book on trigonometry, and the other is Rheticus's *Orationes duae.*"

The librarian's astonishment was almost palpable. How could I have known?

"Easy," I replied. "Those are the other two unusual books also being offered in Paris. You had better get in touch with Interpol right away."

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This advice was far easier to give than to take, for at that time no Polish academic wanted anything to do with the bureaucracy of the military government. Besides, the librarian himself would be in hot water, accused of failing to maintain proper security. I might add that this is a fear shared by librarians worldwide, and the reason they tend to keep their losses secret.

After a few months passed, I realized that nothing was happening on the international front. By chance I encountered the president of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Harvard Yard, and I told him what I knew about the theft. With that, the authorities sprang into action. The next thing I learned was that a lawyer had walked into the Polish embassy in Paris and plunked down a package. Remarking cryptically, "My client no longer needs this," he turned on his heels and left. Embassy officials were baffled to find two old astronomy books in the package, but they shipped them to the History of Science Institute in Warsaw, where my old friend Jerzy Dobrzycki was about to become director. He and his colleagues recognized the contents and returned the *Narratio prima* to Wroclaw.

Nearly forty years had passed since I had first set foot in Poland as an impressionable young cowboy, and twenty-one years since Jerzy Dobrzycki had invited me to come again as an astronomer-turning-historian. After repeated visits I now had not only the satisfaction of seeing the *Narratio prima* returned to its rightful place, but also the unanticipated realization that none of the other *Stephen R. Mallory* cowboys had been so greatly influenced by our shared journey. The butterfly had flapped its wings, and the tempest had gathered.

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Yield

BETH ANN FENNELLY

She makes them still, recipes serving eight
or ten or twelve. It's what she is, the Stroganoff,
the lasagna. She herself now dislikes food,
the empty table, nibbles crust while rearranging
curdled quarts of milk, bronze cold cuts
oxidizing green, pork chops—her husband's
favorite. Sleepless, she bruises garlic and pulls
the beards from mussels. Morning at the gargling
disposal: she marries ketchup from two family-
sized bottles. A habit. A necessary lie.

If there was ever a way to cook for one
she can't remember, or who she was exactly
when she knew. Her babies, grown
and quarrel-scattered, come back only in dreams
to search the freezer, asking, "What is there to eat?"
She pleads, "I'll make you anything you want,"
then wakes, plugs in the twelve-cup coffeepot.
She writes a list of what's gone bad, what's gone,
then shops, avoiding contents that have settled
and check-out clerks who ask, "Will this be all?"

The years flip backwards, indecipherable
as journal pages from that honeymoon
to Italy that she wrote in shorthand.
What she remembers now are the requests,
the favorite birthday dinners of each child,
the man she fed for thirty years who loved her
mashed potatoes, who walked out one day.
She's kept his dinner warm for seven months,
her fingers thinning, wedding band so loose
it falls into the angel food cake batter.

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Inside Science

DAVID GOODSTEIN
and JAMES WOODWARD

It has become fashionable in recent times for scholars from the social sciences and other disciplines to visit the strange continent of Science and send back reports on the natives' behavior and rituals. The resulting dialogue has not always been entirely amicable; it has even been referred to as "The Science Wars." We thought it might be useful to send forth a description of the social organization of science as seen from the *inside.* We can hardly hope to bring the science wars to an end just when they are becoming amusing, but perhaps we can show that the way scientists run their business is in some ways remarkably similar to (and, to be sure, in some ways different from) that of other academic disciplines.

"In the cathedral of science," a famous scientist once said, "every brick is equally important." The remark evokes a vivid metaphor—of swarms of scientific workers erecting a grand monument to the scientific faith. The speaker was Max Delbrück, a Nobel Prize winner who is often called the father of molecular biology. The occasion was an idyllic Sunday afternoon in Pasadena, in Delbrück's backyard, where a group of players (including one of the authors) was enjoying an after-tennis drink. The remark captures with some precision the scientists' ambivalent view of their craft. We doubt that Delbrück believed the bricks he laid were really no better than anyone else's. If anything, he regarded himself as the keeper of the blueprints, and he had the fame and prestige to prove it. But it was exactly his exalted position that made it obligatory for him to

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make a ceremonial bow to the democratic ideal that most scientists espouse and few believe in. In fact, it is precisely the kind of recognition that Delbrück enjoyed that propels the scientific enterprise forward.

There are doubtless many reasons why people choose to become scientists. Simple greed, however, is not high on the list. The rewards for success in science are not primarily monetary (though a certain degree of material well-being often follows in their wake). If you are a scientist, each success is rewarded by the intoxicating glow that comes from knowing or believing that you have won at least one small round in the endless quest for knowledge. But that glow fades quickly unless it brings with it the admiration and esteem of your peers (who are, after all, the only ones capable of understanding what you have done and, usually, the only ones who care). The various means by which scientists express admiration and esteem for their colleagues are so subtle and complex that they beggar the etiquette of a medieval royal court. We will call them collectively the Reward System of science.

Closely linked to the Reward System is a second organization, which we will call the Authority Structure. The Authority Structure guides and controls the Reward System. Moreover, certain positions within the Authority Structure are among the most coveted fruits of the Reward System. Nevertheless, the two are not identical. The pinnacle of the Reward System is scientific glory. The goals of those in the Authority Structure are power and influence. Scientists distinguish sharply between the two organizations. They will sit around the faculty lounge or the lunch table lamenting the fate of a distinguished colleague who has become president of a famous university. "He was still capable of good work," they will say, sounding much like saddened warriors grieving the fate of a fallen comrade. The university president is a kingpin of the Authority Structure, but a dropout from the scientific Reward System.

The Reward System and the Authority Structure are both rooted in the institutions of science. These institutions vary somewhat from one discipline to another, and from one country to another, but the broad outlines will be recognizable to all. Our discussion is most influenced by the physical sciences as they are practiced in the United States.

Scientific research is performed in universities and, to a lesser extent, in colleges that do not grant Ph.D. degrees. It is also performed in national laboratories and in industrial laboratories. The universities and colleges may be public or private. The national laboratories may be run directly by government agencies, or managed for the government by universities or consortia of universities. Industrial laboratories are usually, but not always, operated by a single company.

Scientific societies such as the American Physical Society or the American Chemical Society have members from all of the above kinds of scientific institutions. The societies organize national and regional scientific

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meetings, publish journals, and administer the awarding of certain prizes and honors. They are private organizations whose officers are elected by their members, and whose costs are paid by the dues of their members and by other related sources of income. A few scientific societies (such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science) are not tied to a particular scientific discipline, but still hold meetings and publish journals.

There are also purely honorary societies, typified by the National Academy of Sciences. The NAS holds meetings, publishes a journal, and provides for certain needs of the government through its research and consulting arm, the National Research Council. By far the most important thing the NAS does is to elect its own members. Election to the NAS is one of the highest rungs on the Reward System ladder.

The costs of performing scientific research are borne in large measure by agencies devoted to that purpose. Before World War II, those agencies were largely private, like the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations, but since the war almost all funds for scientific research have originated in the federal government. The most prominent supporters of basic research are the National Science Foundation, an independent agency, and the National Institutes of Health, a part of the Public Health Service of the Department of Health and Human Services. Basic scientific research is also supported by arms of the Department of Defense, the Departments of Energy and Agriculture, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and other agencies. Many have their own laboratories and also award grants to researchers in universities.

These are the elements of the institutions of science. We have left out a few crucial ones, such as the Scandinavian bureaucracy (the Swedish Royal Academy of Science and the Royal Caroline Institute) that awards Nobel Prizes, and the mysterious college of historians and journalists that somehow decides which scientists will become famous outside of science itself. Even within the elements described, there are infinitely subtle layers of influence and prestige.

In universities and colleges, behind a carefully cultivated veneer of cordiality there is a fierce, endless struggle of legendary proportions for positions of honor in a peculiar contest, in which no one is quite sure who is keeping score but everyone knows roughly what the score is. (In recent times, some national news magazines have found it profitable to appoint themselves scorekeepers in this competition. Academic officers dismiss these journalistic judgments—except when their own institutions come out on top.) The contest ranks each university against others, each college against others, and, within a single discipline, departments against departments. There are similar rivalries among national and industrial laboratories, even among federal funding agencies.

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To the aspiring academic scientist, the steps on the perilous ladder to fame and glory look something like this:

1. Be admitted to a prestigious undergraduate college or university (useful but not essential).

2. Graduate with a B.S. degree (essential).

3. Be admitted to a prestigious graduate department (very important).

4. Graduate with a Ph.D. (essential).

5. Get a postdoctoral appointment or fellowship at another prestigious university (almost always lower in the invisible rankings than the university from which you graduated—that's why step 3 is so important).

6. Get a position as assistant professor. The ranking of the university and department is crucial, since you are unlikely ever to move up to a more prestigious one. National and industrial laboratories have positions analogous to assistant professorships. If you prefer a riskier course, start in an industrial lab with the hope of being successful enough to be called to a university later.

7. Bring in external research support (mostly from those federal agencies); attract graduate students of your own; get papers published in the best journals (that usually means the ones published by the professional societies—but there are exceptions, like *Nature*, which is privately published); get invited to speak at national or (even better) international meetings sponsored by professional societies; and generally become visible among active scientists in your own field outside your own institution. Doing all of the above will generally entail making some genuine scientific progress, which will, fortunately, afford enough personal psychic rewards to help keep you going. It is useful, but not essential at this stage of your career, to teach well and to participate in academic committees and the like.

8. Get tenure (as a result of doing step 7 very well).

9. Get promoted to full professor.

10. Your colleagues will darkly suspect that you will now rest on your laurels, and you must prove them wrong. Get more funding, expand the size of your research group (graduate students, postdocs, technicians, et al.). Get yourself appointed to national boards, panels, and committees. Get invited to speak at more meetings. If at all possible, get something named after yourself. This is the most effective way of getting noticed, but it's tricky, since someone else must do it for you, and then it has to catch on among workers in the field.

11. The following are now available if you work hard enough to get them and manage to have a little luck in your research:

—awards and prizes from your professional society
—a chaired professorship
—membership in the National Academy

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—international prizes up to and including the Nobel itself
—immortality.

At each of these stages, you have faced gatekeepers from the Authority Structure of science. They are generally people who have scaled that rung and a few others, but who then stepped out of the competition at some higher point (remember the university president mentioned earlier). For example, faculty members at an undergraduate college (where you may choose to attempt steps 1 and 2) will generally have reached step 4 (a Ph.D.), and perhaps 5 (a postdoc), but opted out of the research competition at step 6 (by taking a position in a college rather than a research university). They may very well never have intended to climb any higher than necessary to reach their positions as college faculty members, but it would have been unwise for them to have admitted as much while they were climbing. Each of the gatekeepers they faced probably had to be convinced they were aspiring to the very pinnacle. These are the same people who will now decide your fate. They are most likely to be impressed if they believe that you, too, aspire to that pinnacle.

At the graduate school level, your Ph.D. thesis adviser—a very important person in your life—will probably be (had better be) still climbing. He or she may very well be quite high already, but decisions about you will be made also by department chairs, deans, and others who have traded their places on the ladder for positions in the Authority Structure of science.

Once you pass the Ph.D., the rules for scaling successive steps become progressively less well defined. The rules are often unwritten, and the people you must impress are farther afield. Each promotion will require confidential letters of recommendation from people outside your own institution, solicited not by you but by the chair of a committee. You will thus be expected to be known by people you have not met, merely because of your growing scientific reputation. Your reputation will be based on published papers whose fate will be in the hands of journal editors and the anonymous referees they have chosen. The research reported in those papers will be possible only if you can win financial support on the basis of research proposals submitted to the granting agencies. Your proposals will be handled by project officers (either permanent or temporary refugees from the race up the research ladder) and judged once again by anonymous referees or panels of active scientists. Finally, even if you manage to finance and publish your work, it will be little noticed unless you also manage to get invited to speak at national meetings organized by your professional society. The staff of the society will generally have dropped out of the race, but decisions about who speaks will most likely be made by committees of active scientists. Notice that at each point of decision, there tend to be two kinds of gatekeepers. One kind is an

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administrator (department chair or dean, journal editor, project officer, professional society staff member) and the other kind an active scientist (writer of letters of recommendation, anonymous referee, member of a panel or committee). The first kind has often stepped out of the race (the position itself is generally the reward for having reached a certain level); the other is still very much in the race. The people in this latter group are not only your judges but also your competition. Moreover, you have become one of them. People in the other group, if they are no longer in competition with you, have often forgotten the fierce struggle you face, and moreover, they tend to have the curious view that you are working for them.

It should be clear from this discussion that scientific scorekeeping is no simple matter. The issue of who will emerge as famous and successful in science depends in large measure on who has the best ideas and who works the hardest. In that sense science is a true meritocracy. However, other elements are very clearly in play here. One of the most important is being in the right place at the right time. For example, the discovery of quantum mechanics early in this century swept a whole generation of theoretical physicists to fame and glory. The very best made truly fundamental contributions, but even those of more modest talent found untouched problems ready to be solved with the new theory. Another example is the wartime projects—most conspicuously the Manhattan Project and the MIT Radiation Lab—that swept yet another generation of physicists to power and influence in the postwar years.

In addition to those factors there are others, observed and documented, that arise out of the behavior and customs of scientists as a group. The sociologist Robert K. Merton has called one of them the Matthew effect, after the Gospel according to St. Matthew: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have in abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

The Matthew effect in science is encapsulated in the observation that credit tends to go to those who are already famous, at the expense of those who are not. If a paper is written by a group of authors, only one of whom is well known in the field, readers will reflexively assume that this person is primarily responsible. A paper signed by Nobody, Nobody, and Somebody will be casually referred to as "work done in Somebody's lab," and even inaccurately attributed in the literature to "Somebody, et al."

Another important piece of scientific folklore is referred to as the Ortega hypothesis, after José Ortega y Gasset, who wrote in his classic 1932 book, *The Revolt of the Masses:*

> For it is necessary to insist upon this extraordinary but undeniable fact: experimental science has progressed thanks in great part to the work

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> of men astoundingly Mediocre. That is to say, modern science, the root and symbol of our actual civilization, finds a place for the intellectually commonplace man and allows him to work therein with success. In this way the majority of scientists help the general advance of science while shut up in the narrow cell of their laboratory like the bee in the cell of its hive, or the turnspit of its wheel.

The Ortega hypothesis is thus the view expressed by Max Delbrück at the outset of this article, but with slightly different metaphors. This widely held perspective is probably based on the empirical observation that there are indeed, in each field of science, many ordinary scientists doing more or less routine work, publishing papers, getting promotions, and generally playing the Reward System game, albeit in the minor leagues. It is also supported by the theoretical view that knowledge of the universe is a kind of limitless wilderness to be conquered by the relentless hacking away of underbrush by many hands. An idea that is supported by both theory and observation always has a very firm standing in science.

The Ortega hypothesis was so named by Jonathan and Steven Cole when they set out to demolish it, a job they accomplished by tracing citations in physics journals. The Ortega hypothesis is incorrect, they concluded, adding:

> It seems, rather, that a relatively small number of physicists produce work that becomes the base for future discoveries in physics. We have found that even papers of relatively minor significance have used to a disproportionate degree the work of the eminent scientists.

In other words, a small number of elite scientists produce the vast majority of scientific advances. Seen in this light, the Reward System is a mechanism evolved for the purpose of identifying, promoting, and rewarding the star performers who will propel science forward. On the other hand, for those who still believe in the Ortega hypothesis, the Reward System is merely a capricious lottery, with the Matthew effect, the old boy network, and other similar inequities helping to distribute credit unfairly.

The beginnings of the Reward System and the Authority Structure can be discerned in the seventeenth century, very close to the birth of modern science itself. It is probably fair to say that experimental physics was invented by Galileo Galilei. Galileo discovered (or perhaps just found supporting evidence for) the law of falling bodies and the law of inertia by means of experiments using ingeniously crafted instruments. The scientific research laboratory was created not much later by the English chemist Robert Boyle, who set up a team of assistants, specialists, techni-

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cians, and apprentices to carry out systematic chemical investigations. Both Galileo and Boyle helped found scientific societies that still exist (L'Accademia dei Lincei and the Royal Society). Boyle supported his research by means of his own wealth, but Galileo spent much of his time and energy seeking government and private sponsorship. (It is not for nothing that he named the moons of Jupiter the *Sidera Medicea*—the Medician stars. Sponsorship by the Medicis no longer being what it once was, they are today more commonly called the Galilean satellites.) Both Galileo and Boyle engaged in fierce struggles over priority for scientific discoveries. In other words, the basic outlines of the social organization of science emerged almost as soon as science did, and it was firmly in place by the time Isaac Newton (who became a chaired professor and president of the Royal Society) wrote his *Principia.* It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that science cannot exist—certainly cannot flourish—without the Reward System and the Authority Structure.

Of course, professional societies, prizes, and awards, to say nothing of department chairs and deans, are by no means limited to the sciences. One can detect the basic elements of the Reward System and the Authority Structure in virtually all academic disciplines. Nevertheless, they seem better developed and more highly organized in the sciences than elsewhere. The reason is undoubtably to be found both in the nature of science and in human nature, since it is we humans who must pursue science. Science is basically a collaborative enterprise aimed at discovering important truths about the world, carried out by individuals who are generally more strongly motivated by their own interests than by the collective good. The Reward System and the Authority Structure serve to regulate and channel this collaboration-*cum*-competition to produce useful results. As long as they do so, this system of ours seems likely to remain firmly in place.

And, oh yes. Science costs a lot of money. That may have something to do with it, too.

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Going Up to Oxford

RENÉE C. FOX

The letter was signed by the American Secretary of the Rhodes Scholarship Trust. It reached me during the second week of July 1994. "At the meeting of the board of Electors for the George Eastman Visiting Professorship at the University of Oxford," it began, "I was authorized to invite you to become the 57th Eastman Professor in the academic year 1996–7. The Eastman Professorship, founded in 1929 and additionally supported since then by the Association of American Rhodes Scholars, makes it possible for distinguished American scholars to be visiting professors at Oxford." The appointment carries with it further "benefits," the letter informed me, "most notably rent-free living quarters in an attractive house designed and built for the Eastman Professor." Enclosed was a list of the holders of the professorship since its inception, headed by an introductory note that identified George Eastman, who had created it, as the founder of the Eastman Kodak Company. The list was intimidating in a number of ways. I recognized five Nobel Prize winners. Virtually everyone else was a famous senior figure who had excelled both within and beyond the particular field of the humanities, the sciences, or the professions to which he belonged. I say "he" advisedly: fifty-five out of the previous fifty-six Eastman professors had been men. And although the range of disciplines from which previous professors had been drawn was wide, no one from my field, sociology, had ever occupied the chair.

A prolonged silence followed my acceptance of the professorship. Nineteen ninety-six arrived, and as I launched my second-semester courses at the University of Pennsylvania, my thoughts turned to the

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teaching responsibilities I would be assuming at Oxford in the fall. With mounting anxiety, I realized that all I knew about them was contained in a cryptic, legalistically phrased statement in the original letter of invitation. ("The statutes of the University of Oxford specify the duties of the Eastman Professor as participation in twenty-four academic functions during the course of the academic year. The nature of these duties is arranged with the department. The Eastman Professor enjoys considerable scope for flexibility in adjusting the pedagogical activities in combination with scholarly projects which the holder may wish to pursue.") Wishing that the scope for flexibility were a little *less* considerable, I wrote the Master of Balliol College, with which I would be associated as a so-called Supernumerary Fellow, asking him some questions about the teaching and proposing some ideas.

The Master's reply was prompt and warm, as were the letters I subsequently received from Balliol's Sociology Fellow. I learned from the Fellow that my field was "by no means as central to the University's activities as History or Politics." This partly explains, he said, "why I, primarily a normative political theorist, am currently Chair of the Sub-Faculty of Sociology." At the undergraduate level, he told me, Sociology was taught only as a component of undergraduate degrees in Philosophy, Politics and Economics—"where it counts as a sub-component of Politics!"—and in Human Sciences. There were Masters' degrees in Sociology and Comparative Social Research, he said, and doctoral studies, "but the number of students is rather small." The sociological research undertaken by the Sub-Faculty was focused primarily on either rational choice theory or the statistical analysis of large-scale data sets, mainly concerned with social stratification, employment, and politics. Regrettably, he said, there was very little medical sociology, my own field. It was becoming dauntingly apparent that it would not be possible for me to fulfill my teaching "duties" primarily through or within Oxford's sociological enclave. How and why a female sociologist of my genre had been elected as George Eastman Professor seemed more inexplicable than ever.

In June, I received a letter from the College Secretary about the reception that would be held by the Master and Fellows of Balliol in the Senior Common Room on October 10 to welcome me to Oxford, and the small dinner that would take place in the Master's Lodgings prior to this "Eastman At Home." She also informed me that at the first College Meeting of the year, to be held at 4:00 P.M. on Friday, October 11, I would be "formally admitted," and she enclosed a copy of Statute III 8 of Balliol College, which I would be asked to repeat aloud on that occasion:

DECLARATION BY FELLOW

> I will be true and faithful to the College, will observe its Statutes and By-Laws, and promote its interests and studies.

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I later learned that the "Eastman At Home" reception was the social event that inaugurated Balliol's academic year, and that academic gowns were required because the Vice Chancellor of the University—its chief executive officer—would be present. The College Meeting where I would be inducted into the Balliol Fellows, and pledge my fealty to the College, would be a gowned event as well.

An ocean and a summer still separated me from my Eastman year, but the impression of Oxford that I was developing through the mail was of a world that was structured and embellished by venerable customs, rituals, and rules; where Latin was still a symbolic, ceremonial language, redolent of classical civilization and of the University's earlier ecclesiastical history; and where each college had its own distinctive traditions and internal life.

In the third week of September, I boarded a British Airways jet for my journey to England. Even if I had traveled by sea rather than air, according to the proper British phraseology I would still have been "going up to Oxford." Why, I wondered? Because I was moving in a northerly direction? Or because I was ascending, educationally and socially, to a higher place?

The University Offices sent a chauffeured car to meet me at Heathrow Airport and drive me to Oxford. It was still early morning when we drew up in front of the house, which had been constructed at the end of the 1950s expressly for the Eastman Professor and first occupied in the fall of 1961. The land on which it was built belongs to Balliol and is "quite unpurchasable," as the expression goes; but through a declaration of trust, it was made available to the College as the site of Eastman House for a minimum of sixty years, and beyond that, for as long as the Eastman Professorship remains attached to Balliol. It is situated on a tree-lined, dead-end street, at the intersection of Jowett Walk and St. Cross Road, across the green expanse of the Master's Field from the King's Mound, the spacious Victorian house planned by Benjamin Jowett in which the Master of Balliol College resides. (Jowett, a classicist who was Master of Balliol from 1870 to 1893 and known as the greatest Oxford tutor of his time, established the College's high intellectual standing and, through his pupils, its considerable political influence in the British nation and Empire.)

From an Oxonian perspective, Eastman House is ideally situated in a verdant, quiet place only a few blocks away from the pulsating center of the city—from the Bodleian (the University's four-hundred-year-old library) and the Radcliffe Camera (the huge, domed, eighteenth-century building that serves as the library's principal reading room); from Blackwell's (the bookstore on Broad Street that, since its founding in 1879, has been as much a feature of Oxford as the University's institutions); and from the Broad Street front of Balliol College itself, with its "Balmoral Gothic" façade and its massive, wood-and-iron portal.

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Eastman House has no number and is enclosed by a high hedge. Only its two chimneys and a bit of its roof were visible as my car approached. But when I opened the heavy wooden gate, there stood a two-story house with ocher-colored stone walls, a roof of brown stone slabs, and casement windows in painted, white wooden frames. Set on a big lawn and bordered by a considerable garden, it resembled an oversized modern version of a cottage in the surrounding Cotswold countryside. Blooming at the threshold of its white front door was a strikingly luxuriant and fragrant lavender bush. Appended to the house was a miniature flat in which the housekeeper lived with her teenage daughter. She was awaiting my arrival with a welcoming cup of tea and a tour of the house's four bedrooms, three bathrooms, living and dining rooms, kitchen, and study.

The house was designed by an English architect with an American architect as his consultant. The committee that was appointed in 1956 by the Association of American Rhodes Scholars to oversee its construction and furnishing had aspired to make it a "modest" residence, "comfortable for modern conditions," with "heating gadgets, kitchen gadgets, laundry gadgets, and plumbing gadgets familiar to the American housewife"—a house that was "pleasing to the eye," would "in the modern world express some of the character of Oxford," and would "add to the felicity both of teaching and learning." As I experienced it forty years later, Eastman House embodied all these attributes.

The rather frayed and faded state of its elegant furnishings gave them a homey, lived-in look that reminded me of interiors I had known in my youth: chintz upholstery, heavy drapes, marble fireplace, abundant floor and table lamps with tipsy shades and tasseled pulls. There were more electrical outlets than I could easily count—no doubt considered essential for the array of "gadgets" that the house's British planners thought Americans were prone to use. Great pains had also been taken to make the house less frigid than the British norm. A once-state-of-the-art central heating system functioned rather mysteriously and erratically in an attempt to generate American warmth. But in late October and early November, as the weather turned gray—with dark mornings, misty days, night frosts, and sea winds that penetrated the windows, the glass doors of the living and dining rooms, and the very pores of the house—the American warmth proved no match for the British chill, and I had to plug in the electric heaters that were thoughtfully supplied for every room.

In the wood-paneled, ground-floor study, throughout all the seasons, I was able to enjoy what the Eastman House committee had called the "felicity" of my intellectual life at Oxford. Here, at a worn, leather-topped desk, in a room lined with shelves on which there were copies of books written and donated by past Eastman Professors, I prepared lectures, worked on manuscripts, wrote letters, and read. In an inconspicuous corner closet, built into the paneling, I found an academic gown with a

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label sewn inside that identified it as a gift from a prior Eastman Professor, with apologies for the fact that it was fashioned more in a Cambridge than in an Oxford mode. The books and the gown acquainted me with the tradition, established by previous Eastman Professors, of presenting gifts to the house and its occupants: one of the countless things I was expected to learn in the course of the year without being told.

Hanging on the wall outside the study was a framed photograph of a man with an ascetic face, a cravat, a starched collar, a pocket handkerchief, and wire-rimmed glasses. It was marked by a brass plate inscribed:

GEORGE EASTMAN
1854–1932

Every morning when I came downstairs to begin the day, and every evening when I climbed the staircase to retire, I took note of my benefactor: an American of English ancestry; an inventor, pioneer of photography, self-made businessman, and enlightened philanthropist; a shy, taciturn, and generous man who never married, and in the end, when confined by illness to his house in Rochester, New York, with only his servants and nurses for company, took his own life, leaving an initialed note that read, "My work is done; why wait?"

There was at least one other somewhat spectral presence who was a part of my daily Eastman House round. This was the postman, who slipped the mail through the slot in the front door no later than 7:15 A.M. I never met him, but looking down from my bedroom window, I caught glimpses as he came and went, never quite closing the gate behind him. I was intrigued by the fact that he always wore a helmet, though I had never seen him in, on, or near any vehicle. I amused myself by imagining he rode a bicycle or motor scooter that, like the Cheshire Cat, had the power to vanish. For this was, after all, Oxford, the setting that C. L. Dodgson, a don and mathematics tutor at Christ Church College, transposed into Wonderland. Then, one February morning, when gale-force winds were driving sheets of rain along Jowett Walk, the postman appeared without his helmet, wearing a slicker, wheeling a bicycle, and carrying an electric torch. My Alice fantasy gave way to an image of Diogenes of Sinope.

From within the enclosure of the house and the garden, I could hear some of the distinctive sounds of Oxford: the reverberations of cricket and tennis balls from the Master's playing field; the hum of traffic on St. Cross Road; the squeaking of rain-rusted bicycle wheels and brakes; the laughter of passing students; the choruses of blackbirds and, occasionally, the nocturnal solo of a nightingale; and the pervasive music of Oxford's bells, dominated by the mighty, ecclesiastical tones of "Great Tom," tolling from the Tom Tower of Christ Church College.

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The Eastman House garden seemed almost perpetual. It receded when the gray frosts of November descended, but as early as February, the tree bark was turning green, and crocuses and snowdrops were coming into view. In mid-March a prolonged vernal outburst began, filled with golden daffodils, roses of many hues, apple blossoms, tulips, hyacinths, and an astounding variety of flowering perennials bordering the garden's paved walk. It was not just to the stirring beauty of the colors and fragrances that my Manhattan-bred being responded, but to something about the garden that was profoundly English.

With the arrival of spring, a pair of ducks—a male and a female—began to take daily strolls on the lawn and to perch on the roofs of the houses on St. Cross Road, where they seemed to have built a nest. On several occasions, at twilight, I caught sight of a young fox scampering across the stone wall that separated Eastman House from the Master's Field. There was a colony of foxes living nearby, I was told, in the cemetery of St. Cross Church.

The 1996–97 academic year at Oxford began on October 13 and was divided into three terms of eight weeks each, with six weeks of vacation at Christmas, and again at Easter. These were named, respectively, the Michaelmas, Hilary, and Trinity terms, and they constituted not only the calendrical framework within which all University events were scheduled but also, as the Head Porter of Balliol College astutely pointed out, an in-group "peculiarity of speech." The weeks of Oxford's teaching period, one to eight, are flanked on either side by "0th week and "9th week," reserved for exams and meetings. Navigating Oxonian time is virtually impossible without what is known as an "Oxford diary," a blue, pocket-sized appointment book, published by the Oxford University Press, with the University's seal stamped on its cover in gold. It contains practical data about the University, such as listings of its officers; its colleges and their heads, bursars, and senior tutors; the dates of its examinations; its libraries, museums, departments, institutes; and various "institutions not being part of the University, but having associations with it." More singularly, it also lists the Saints' days of the Anglican liturgical calendar; "moveable [Christian] feasts and fasts"; major Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, and Islamic holy days; the dates of the national holidays of fourteen European countries, Canada, and the United States; "the hours of sunrise and sunset for Oxford and of the phases of the moon" in Greenwich Mean Time (reproduced with permission, from data supplied by H. M. Nautical Almanac Office); the "lighting-up time for vehicles"; London Underground, train, and coach routes; post office hours; and the members of Parliament from the city of Oxford.

I received this indispensable item as a gift from the Secretary to the Eastman Electors in the University Offices, who was responsible for han-

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dling certain practical matters relating to my professorship: my exemption from a British work permit as an academic visitor; my entry visa; the payment of my salary "in sterling" to a personal checking account "on the last but one working day of each month"; and my entitlement to treatment under the National Health Service as someone who was "settling" in the United Kingdom for more than six months.

In September, a notice had appeared in the *University Gazette* that, by accepting the degree of Master of Arts voted to me "by Special Resolution of the Congregation of the University," I had been "deemed approved by Congregation," and was henceforth a registered, voting member of what in effect was the Parliament of the University. Most of my activities, however, revolved around my College, Balliol. Every day—sometimes more than once a day—I entered the College gate, greeted and conversed with the porters in their "lodge" beneath the gatehouse, gave them my outgoing mail, took my incoming mail from my pigeonhole in the post room, and passed through the two archways that led successively to the small Front Quadrangle and the large Garden Quadrangle behind it. Inside this gate and these quadrangles, I was a participating member of an encompassing and, in some ways, sequestered microcosm—one of the thirty-nine highly autonomous communities formed by the Colleges of the University of Oxford.

Balliol has its own, historically grounded myth of origin—one that places it, along with Merton and University Colleges, among the three oldest of Oxford's colleges. As chronicled by Balliol's present Dean and Archivist, the College began with an act of penance that John de Balliol, Lord of Bywell and Barnard Castle, was obliged to perform in 1260 for kidnapping his neighbor, Walter Kirkham, the Bishop of Durham, with whom he had persistent differences. Part of his penance was to provide a perpetual endowment for the support of scholars at Oxford. By 1263, John Balliol had installed sixteen scholars in a house that he rented from the University, located on what is still the College's main site. It was not until 1282, however, fourteen years after John's death, that his widow, Dervorguilla of Galloway, Lady of Balliol, completed the foundation of the College by drawing up a code of Statutes, increasing the endowment, purchasing and renovating permanent housing for the "scholars of Balliol," and equipping this medieval corporation with a "common seal" (whose beautifully engraved matrix, retained by the College over the centuries, the Archivist arranged for me to see).

Daily life inside Balliol unfolded along its concrete and gravel paths; behind the doors of its twenty-three wooden staircases, marked with Roman numerals; in the students' rooms and the Fellows' offices (also called rooms); in the Junior, Senior, and Old Common Rooms; in the administrative offices; in the Master's Lodgings above them (now his office rather than a residence, and the place where certain meetings,

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receptions, and small dinners took place); in the College Chapel and its Library; and in the wood-paneled Hall, with its long, polished dining tables, cathedral-style windows, organ, and portrait gallery of past Masters and distinguished past members.

Framing all the comings and goings of the College, embellishing its calendar of activities and events, and marking the waxing and waning of the seasons were the Master's and Fellows' gardens and lawns. These were not only aesthetically appreciated by the College community but symbolically important to its collective self-image, its ancestral pride, and its ideas of continuity and renewal. Balliol's Librarian oversaw the gardeners' planting and pruning. A catalogue of Balliol's trees and shrubs has been periodically produced by one or another of its Fellows. (The most recent one, dated January 1998, is forty-eight pages long and contains many images and text entries from the World Wide Web. At the top of its title page is a deftly altered version of the College arms: a pitchfork has been inserted into the elevated right foreleg of its crowned, rampant lion.) Foremost among the gardens' legends is the gnarled mulberry tree in the Garden Quad, reputedly planted by Elizabeth I but probably grown from one of the seeds distributed by James I in his failed campaign to develop an English silk industry. Split asunder by some bygone storm, it has been propped up for as long as anyone can remember, yet continues to bear excellent fruit. The lawns and gardens have their resident mascots as well: three ducks and a large tortoise called Rosa Luxemburg, whose name may recall the involvement of Balliol students in left-wing politics during the 1960s and 1970s.

It was a professor of classical literature and a professor of history who introduced me to some of the ways of the Senior Common Room the first afternoon I lunched there. Throughout the year they continued to be translators of the complex, enigmatic culture that surrounded me. On the surface, the cycle of College activities they outlined, though more elaborately social and ceremonial than the life to which I was accustomed, did not seem beyond my ken: a procession of meals (everyday dining, Wednesday night Consilium dinners, Thursday night guest dinners, Sunday night concert dinners, and a number of special gala dinners, including the St. Catherine's Day feast, in honor of the College's patron saint, and the dinner in recognition of John Snell, an eighteenth-century Scottish benefactor); monthly College meetings of the Fellows; a series of intellectual events (such as the Master's seminars and the Research Consilium presentations); Sunday and weekday chapel services. But how to behave on these occasions, all of which were structured and regulated by a myriad of largely unstated customs and rules, was neither simple nor obvious.

To begin with, which of these activities were optional, and which, if any, were compulsory? College meetings and Consilium dinners ap-

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peared to be the most obligatory—at least, if you could not be present, the proper thing to do was to write a note to the Master explaining your anticipated absence and asking to be excused. College meetings were important because of their relationship to the functioning and governance of Balliol. The significance of the Consilium dinners—the only time during the week when all the Fellows came together—was more recondite. Held in the Senior Common Room, these formal, multi-course meals were glossed by printed menus, lit by candles, ornamented by choice pieces of the College's silver, and lubricated by fine wines. No outside guests were invited. In an atmosphere of wit and laughter, tensions that might have developed over the course of the week inside the College were diminished, and solidarity implicitly reinforced, by the ritualistic power of these traditional, masculinity-infused repasts, each of which ended with the distribution of cigarettes and good cigars and the passing of a ram's horn filled with snuff, of which virtually no one partook.

When should I wear an academic gown? I knew gowns were required for some College events—at College meetings, "High Table" dinners held in the Grand Hall, feast days, guest nights, and concert nights. But even though the invitations to some dinners helpfully specified gown-wearing, certain "on-off" nuances had to be learned by trial and error. We ate in the Senior Common Room area without gowns and in the Hall with them, I learned when I finally asked, because the Common Room "belonged" to the Fellows—and so we were "at home" there—whereas when we mounted the staircase to the Hall, we entered the precincts of the College. Nevertheless, College meetings that took place on Senior Common Room turf were gowned affairs. It took me longer to be sure that I knew the correct protocol for gowns on Sunday concert nights. This involved three phases: putting on gowns for dinner in the Hall; taking them off for dessert served in the Senior Common Room; donning them again for attendance at the musical program in the Hall that followed dessert.

What were the proper modes of address? I was surprised that Balliol Fellows immediately called me "Renée" and expected me to use their first names as well. I had anticipated greater British formality. Even more startling was the experience of being introduced as the Eastman Professor to a titled member of another Oxford college—"Sir X" or "Lord Y"—and having him promptly tell me to call him Fred or Tony. It took me a while to realize that becoming a Balliol Fellow had admitted me (temporarily) to the elite ranks of Oxford, in which, irrespective of age, professional eminence, or social class, a certain democratic familiarity prevailed.

And yet, in certain contexts—at College meetings, for instance—no one was addressed by his or her first or family name. Only College titles were used: Master, Dean, Senior Tutor, Praefectus, Estates Bursar, Domestic Bursar, Chaplain, Librarian, Senior Fellow, Camerarius (the Fellow in charge of the Rooms Committee), Agentarius (the Fellow responsible for

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the College silver). As the Senior Proctor of the University remarked in his traditional Trinity term oration, Oxford is a place "where outsiders suspect that all sorts of activities go on that ought to have terminated two hundred years ago, and where . . . antique job titles persist more than in many other places."

In still other settings, names and titles were shed and Fellows were identified only by their initials—for example, on the sign-up sheets for meals and various other College functions, and on the records kept of Fellows' dining, postal, telephone, and office expenses, which, in turn, were entered on their accounts, known as "battels." (According to *The Oxford English Dictionary, battel* is a word of "uncertain origin" whose etymology "has been the subject of abundant conjecture. Much depends on the original sense at Oxford: if this was 'food, provisions,' it is natural to connect it with BATTLE *v.* to feed, receive nourishment. . . . But conclusive evidence that *battels* had this sense is wanting, while already before 1600 it had that of 'debita,' *sums due* to the college for provisions, etc.")

Despite the College's commitment to playing down the status distinctions among Fellows on all but the most formal and ceremonial occasions, a subliminal sense of hierarchy permeated its communal life. The implicit presence of hierarchy was visible in small but symbolically meaningful ways. For example, not every Fellow had a napkin ring. These silver rings were assigned "strictly on the basis of seniority," I was informed—seniority determined by the time one first entered the College as a Fellow. When a Fellow entitled to a napkin ring died, retired, or left Oxford to take up an academic or professional position elsewhere, his or her ring went to the most senior person in the College who did not yet have one. As the holder of the Eastman Professorship for the year, I was accorded a silver napkin ring—one that for unstated reasons was distinguished from all the others by its octagonal rather than circular shape.

I was able to put the napkin rings of Balliol into larger perspective when I invited a philosopher from London to lunch at the College. She told me that when she had visited the home of her future parents-in-law before her marriage, she was given an ordinary napkin, without a silver ring, to use at the dinner table. Since her marriage, although the quality of the napkin she receives has improved, it is still not placed in a silver ring. These are reserved for blood relatives, she explained; they are not assigned to relatives through marriage. But the children born to her husband and herself—her parents-in-law's grandchildren—will eventually be deemed worthy of napkin rings. Such seemingly trivial distinctions, at Balliol and without, reflect the crucial role played in British society by ingrained conceptions of lineage and belonging.

At Balliol, certain incidents revealed the status sensitivity that lay just below the surface of the College's ostensible egalitarianism. The decision

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to make an alphabetical rearrangement of the Fellows' pigeonholes in the post room was one such occurrence. This perturbed some of the senior Fellows because it placed their pigeonholes underneath those of more junior Fellows. Such status distinctions and their covert importance were not confined to the members of the Senior Common Room; they were also present in the echelons of the College's domestic staff. Posing for an official group photograph brought these distinctions into sharp, momentary view. The Heads of various departments and the Head Chef were placed in one row of the picture, and the maintenance people in another. A mini-crisis erupted over the positioning of the Head Gardener, who objected to being grouped with the maintenance personnel, alongside the other College gardener, rather than with the departmental heads with whom he thought he rightfully belonged. After the imbroglio, one staff member observed, "John Major's classless society will never happen in England!"

I came to realize that the coexistence of hierarchy, on the one hand, and the minimization of hierarchy, on the other, was a pervasive characteristic of Oxford. The University's officers occupied a colorful array of ranked statuses—Chancellor, High Steward, Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Proctor, Pro-Proctor, Assessor, Public Orator, member of the Hebdomadal Council (Oxford's executive body). Yet the University traditionally operated in a framework described by a Balliol Senior Fellow as "extremely flat," in both salary and power, because flat salary structures were thought to contribute to harmonious, collaborative relations, and the decentralization of power was thought compatible with the independence of the colleges, with non-coerced order, and with the free competition of ideas.

To a far greater extent than in the American milieux in which I customarily moved, I was watchfully self-aware of what I said in the Senior Room and the Hall of the College, and of how and when I said it. Conversation was unusually interesting and enjoyable, but it was not as free-wheeling as it appeared. Rather, with choreographed grace, it unfolded in a certain style and tempo, guided by unspoken rules. It was witty; it was not excessively scholarly or discipline-bound; it had personality without being self-centered or immodest; it never became too intense, probing, or inquisitive. The conversation was also heedfully inclusive, taking into careful consideration the range of fields and interests represented by the entire group seated at the long dining tables. Silent signals conveyed the message that to ask more than an occasional, well-timed question might be considered either an intrusion or an indication of insufficient self-reliance. And although they were never explicitly stated, the constraining norms that regulated the discussion of one's own intellectual work or professional achievements were especially powerful.

Despite the help I received from Balliol Fellows, and despite their many acts of discreet kindness, these invisible rules, along with the el-

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egantly camouflaged controls that enforced them, made understanding Balliol and Oxford, and how to comport myself within them, a prolonged process. When I briefly returned to Philadelphia for the Christmas holiday break, I could tell my family and friends remarkably little about what Oxford was like or about the intellectual projects of my Balliol colleagues.

I repeatedly heard the quip, "No matter how long one has been at Oxford, *no one* knows how it works!" As for the University's "bird's nest budget," a former administrator of its Nuffield Department of Medicine wrote in the *Oxford Magazine* that it is ensconced in "secretive mechanisms which have evolved over the centuries," with the result that "where the University's money comes from, how it is managed, and where it goes" is a matter of "endless debate." There was wry humor and a tinge of institutional pride in the way that people spoke of these entrenched forms of Oxonian "ignorance," so deeply rooted in the University's history, mores, and structure.

The convivially impersonal and circumspect nature of conversation at Balliol College (and in the gamut of other colleges where I was invited to dine or lecture) made all the more striking the candor and, in some cases, the fierceness of the obituaries of recently deceased Oxford Fellows that I had occasion to read in the course of the year. The most memorable of these was the obituary of the historian A. L. Rowse in *Oxford Today:*

> Alfred Leslie Rowse was born near St. Austell, Cornwall . . . the son of a china-clay miner. Intellectually and aesthetically precocious despite a discouraging background, he went up to Christ Church in 1923 on a county scholarship. His college scholarship was in English but he changed to history, with great success, culminating in an All Souls fellowship. . . . Overwork as an undergraduate damaged his health, and trouble with duodenal ulcers obliged him to be careful of his health ever after. But industriousness in reading and writing remained a settled habit, and during the 1960s, when student protesters were besieging All Souls, he turned on the rebels with a fully justified account of his productivity. . . .
>
> As an historian he will best be remembered for his broadly conceived and deeply researched volumes on Tudor England . . . with later studies of Elizabethan expansion overseas and of Elizabethan cultural life. He achieved an even wider public with his Shakespearian studies which included an edition of the *Sonnets* and . . . a celebrated identification of their "dark lady" as Emilia Lanier, daughter of an Italian court musician. This deft conjecture did not win universal acceptance, but Rowse's strident presentation of the case in its favour, and his robust dismissal of any arguments against, ensured that the discussion secured very wide publicity. . . .
>
> His vehemence was notorious but this should not detract from the achievements of his main writings. . . .
>
> He wrote compulsively until the end of his long life. . . . He prided

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himself on his copious diary, kept daily since 1925, which, when eventually published, will ensure that Rowse's personality—egocentric, indiscreet and opinionated—is deployed for posterity.

In spite of the democratization that has taken place since World War II, the influence of more patrician and more male-dominated times on present-day Oxford, as on present-day England, has not been dispelled. It is as subtle as it is subterranean—no more than a phrase like "despite a discouraging background" in the Rowse obituary, or the confessional tone in which a Fellow whose father was a carpenter, a gardener, or "in trade" referred to his modest social origins (*if* he did).

Although the tradition of compulsory celibacy for all Balliol Tutors, and the choice of lifelong bachelorhood for many Fellows, ended around 1900, a move to admit women as Fellows and students to the College did not begin until the 1960s. It took until 1971 for Balliol to pass a resolution to delete the words "No woman may be admitted as a member of the College" from its Statutes; three years later, it was resolved at a College Consilium to admit graduate and undergraduate students of both sexes; and another three years ensued before, in Michaelmas Term of 1979, the first women students passed through the gates of the College. The Balliol student body with which I became acquainted consisted of 159 women and 250 men undergraduates, and at the graduate level, 44 women and 110 men. But out of the sixty Balliol Fellows, only six were women, including the Librarian, a Short-Term Fellow, and a Junior Research Fellow. Of these, only three women were regular Tutorial Fellows, and a sole woman was a Professorial Fellow with a named chair. The maleness of Balliol was more than a demographic fact; it infused the College's culture and atmosphere—what one of the women Fellows called the "laddish" ambience of some of Balliol's feast days, the all-male portraits of past Masters that hung in the Hall, and the Fellows' attachment to the battered leather chairs in the Senior Common Room (which would long ago have been replaced, or at least reupholstered, had women been in charge).

As the academic year unfolded at College Meetings and Consilia—the Fellows' private domestic discussions—a number of Balliol issues arose, and were discussed and decided by the community of Fellows. At a February meeting, the Portrait Committee reported that there was no room left on the walls of the Hall for additional portraits. The last remaining space had been allotted to the portrait of a Balliol alumnus, former Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath. The College now faced the question of whether to commission a large portrait of its official Visitor—a barrister—to hang in the Hall, or a smaller one for the lobby of the Senior Common Room. "It seems rather fatuous to commission a small portrait to hang in that obscure lobby . . . alongside the two larger portraits of other legal

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worthies," declared the Chairman of the Portraits Committee, indicating however that his committee had not yet met on the matter. Of more concern were plans for a portrait of the present Master: the budget was considered "slightly insufficient" to commission a painting of appropriate quality and size, and there was the problem of finding a prominent place in the Hall where, once completed, it could be put on permanent display.

At a previous College meeting it was announced that during the interim between Michaelmas and Hilary Terms, when the College was closed for Christmas and the New Year, a valuable antique clock had been stolen from the mantel in the Master's Quarters. No papers related to the clock could be found to present to the insurers, the Fellows were told; but it was fortuitously noted that hanging outside the Senior Common Room there was a photograph of the Chief Justices of the British, Irish, and Scottish Courts—all Balliol men—posed in front of the mantel, with clock in place. With a mixture of pragmatism, bantering, and College pride, the Fellows decided that in lieu of certifying papers, the photograph should be handed over to the insurers—documentation, the Fellows were later informed, that was accepted by the insurance company.

Deliberation over how the College wished to structure the management of its domestic and financial business in the future, centering on its Bursarships, extended over a period of several months. Balliol had the traditional college model of an Estates Bursar, who administered the College's investments in equity and property, and a Domestic Bursar, who handled the internal arrangements of the College, including its conferences, kitchen, staff, and "fabric" (maintenance and construction). Balliol's Estates Bursar had always been an academic Fellow of the College, while the Domestic Bursar was a nonacademic. With the imminent retirement of the present Domestic Bursar, and the imminent departure of the Estates Bursar to assume a research professorship at the Australian National University, the College now had "an opportunity," as the Master wrote in a white paper, "to think seriously about moving to a single Bursarship. . . . Whilst there is no doubt about the loyalty of Fellows to the College, it is also clear that they are finding it more difficult to take on College Offices in an environment where teaching and research demands are more pressing." Furthermore, changes in financial conditions, particularly those associated with the national government's incipient reorganization of higher education and with modifications in the student funding and fee system, would alter the "inhouse skills" on which the College would need to draw.

At the first College Meeting of the Trinity Term, on April 25, the prospect of fusing the two Bursarships into one was discussed at length by the Fellows in their characteristically stylish, wit-infused way, with occasional outward flashes of strong sentiment. Considerable unease was expressed over the amount of power that a single Bursar would wield.

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There was also concern about the likelihood that someone with the requisite abilities to fill such a position would probably not come from academia and might therefore be "out of touch with its principles" and with the "often small mechanisms that sustain a necessary collegiality."

The Fellows also considered how explicitly the Bursar's job description should be stated in the announcement that the College would issue about its search. A vocal group of Fellows objected to the detailed nature of the description that had been distributed at the meeting, on the grounds that if candidates for the position were told less, their applications and interviews could be used to evaluate how close to the mark they came in discerning what the job entailed. Somewhat to my own amazement, I raised my hand at this point in the discussion and was recognized by the Master. It was the first time I had spoken at a College Meeting. I knew the College took considerable pride, I said, in being as parsimonious as possible in the amount of information and explanation it was accustomed to communicating. However, I continued, it seemed to me that the document that had been circulated contained an excellent, succinct description of the job—one that would be useful if the College intended to recruit the Bursar from outside a small, enclosed circle of persons who already had insider access to what was necessary to know. There was a ripple of what sounded like appreciative chuckles in response to my allusion to the College's norms of taciturnity, and with what seemed wry approval, the Master stated that he was glad to hear that the job description was adequately stated. (After prolonged deliberation, the Fellows decided on a single Bursarship.)

I suppose it could be said that on the threshold of the third term of the academic year, not only had I reached the point where I was emboldened to participate publicly in a College Meeting, but I had learned to do so in the ritually prescribed manner that accorded me deeper entrée into the layered depths of Balliol.

The most vexing issue with which the entire University grappled throughout my stay at Oxford concerned plans to erect a new building for the expanding School of Management on 2.1 acres of the Mansfield Road sports ground. These plans were set into motion by a pledge of twenty million pounds to the School made by Wafic Rida Said, a Syrian-born businessman and philanthropist. Eighteen million were to go toward the cost of the building, with the balance of two million forming the nucleus of an endowment fund for the development of the school, which was to be renamed the Said Business School. Mr. Said and his wife were already members of the Chancellor's Court of Benefactors, a distinction bestowed by the Chancellor, at the request of Hebdomadal Council, on those "instrumental in outstanding acts of generosity," as the Oxford *Development News* put it, to the University and to the colleges. His pledge

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constituted the most "munificent benefaction" made to the University by a private individual since Lord Nuffield's gift to the Medical School in the 1930s. It was Mr. Said's wish that the building be located in central Oxford, on a site suitable for the construction of an edifice of distinguished architectural design that would facilitate the development of a world-class business school.

A special resolution to allocate part of the Mansfield Road sports ground for this purpose caused far-reaching furor, and was voted down by Congregation on November 5, 1996. Ostensibly, the controversy that erupted emanated from what was referred to as "the sensitivity of the site": a green parkland, formerly held by Merton College, which in 1964 had been persuaded to sell a portion of its playing fields to the University to allow for the expansion of the Science Area, with the proviso that the remainder of the fields "should be kept in perpetuity as Open Space." Constructing the business school building on the Mansfield Road site would not only violate this provision, but would also displace the University Club, which furnished "social and sporting facilities for academic, non-academic, and academic-related staff." In a signed statement of protest titled "Why the Business School should NOT be sited on Mansfield Road," spokespersons for the Club contended that it played "a crucial role in allowing the staff of the University to mix, and indeed [was] the only social and sporting facility of any kind available to those not attached to a college."

Beneath the surface of these concerns lay uneasiness over how the building of the business school would transform Oxford's essential academic landscape. There was disquietude about how academically independent the school would be of its benefactor and of the trustees he had the right to appoint to the Said Business School Foundation. And there were reservations about the University's commitment to creating a business school of international stature that would supposedly enable Oxford to "maintain and develop its influential role in public affairs around the world in the next century," while making a significant contribution to management education in Britain and to the improvement of the country's economic performance. Whatever it accomplished, was a business school compatible with the scholarly interests of Oxford's previous generations and with the intellectual and academic excellence of the teaching and research done by the rest of the University?

On June 12, 1997, a Special Resolution about the Said Business School was printed in the *Oxford University Gazette.* "After an exhaustive trawl of possibilities," it announced, the University's Working Party on Sites had identified an alternative location for the school: a railroad station forecourt site of 4.3 acres, with "the advantages of ample area, proximity to the rest of the University, location by the rail and western road entries to the city and a highly visible road frontage." (Slightly less than an acre at

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the rear of the site could not be built on because it held the Rewley Abbey ruins, but they could be used as an "architectural and historical feature of the development.") The new resolution also stated that Mr. Said and his fellow trustees had decided to change the composition of the foundation's board in such a way as to maintain Mr. Said's intention of drawing the majority of trustees "from the external world" and at the same time make clear that "he does not wish, and has never wished to control the foundation" or to have the foundation "interfere in the academic direction and day-to-day management of the school."

On June 17, the resolution was approved in Congregation by a majority of 342 to 55 votes; and in July, the Oxford City Council gave "outline planning permission" for the new construction. Following these struggles over finding a place for a business school amidst the green playing fields and dreaming spires of Oxford had given me a vivid opportunity to witness and appreciate what responding to end-of-the-twentieth-century challenges entailed for this venerable, tradition-encrusted university.

As the Eastman Professor, I was the beneficiary of numerous local privileges, including invitations to join the Ashmolean Club, a dining club, in existence for more than a century, whose members are drawn from heads of house and science professors; to attend the Rhodes Scholars banquet; and to partake in the annual dinner held at St. John's College in honor of Sir Thomas White, a rich member of the Merchant Taylors' Company, an Alderman, and Lord Mayor of London, who founded the College in 1555 to combat Protestant heresies as well as to further the education of boys from the Merchant Taylors' School. (At both these dinners I was seated at the head table.)

But there were honors conferred on me by Balliol College that meant more to me than any others. The first of these was the tutorial that a small group of Balliol medical students took the initiative of organizing with me, partly in response to my plaint that although, through the sporadic lectures I was giving in various Oxford contexts, I was more than fulfilling the pedagogical obligations of the Eastman Professor to participate in "twenty-four academic functions," I was not doing what I regarded as "*real* teaching"—and I missed it greatly. At intervals that were responsive both to the students' clinical rotation schedule and to the issues that their experiences on different clinical services evoked, we assembled around the dining-room table of Eastman House for enjoyable, searching discussions, leavened by gourmet sandwiches and pâtisserie purchased from a shop on Woodstock Road, and washed down by pots of steaming tea.

In May, I was invited to give the College's next Research Consilium, to be held in June. This was a gathering that took place twice a term, on Wednesday at 6:00 P.M., in the Old Common Room, just before the weekly Consilium dinner in the Hall. I considered this an honor because only six

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Balliol Fellows were given a chance to make such a presentation during the academic year and because it was one of the rare occasions on which the College's usual normative restraints on talking at length about one's work were suspended. I decided to discuss "Medical Uncertainty Revisited," a paper I was writing, within the framework of my career-long preoccupation with this phenomenon in the various settings—in medical science, medical education, and clinical medicine—in which I have conducted sociological research. Twenty-five or thirty Fellows were present. The atmosphere in the room was attentive. Somewhere in the course of my presentation, however, I began to get the uneasy feeling that my colleagues were interpreting my analysis in a more religious than sociological way, in response to the connections that I made between medical uncertainty and the "emotionally and existentially charged questions about the meaningfulness as well as the efficacy of physicians' efforts to safeguard their patients' well-being, relieve their suffering, heal their ills, restore their health, and prolong their lives." The talk appeared to "go down well" (to use a British expression). But then, at the precise moment when the Fellow chairing the meeting was about to bring it to a close, a thunder-and-lightning storm suddenly erupted. Laughter filled the Old Common Room. My presentation, the group laughter implied, had unleashed a powerful reaction from the heavens. Supernatural sociology!

Balliol extended a genuine spiritual honor to me: an invitation by the College Chaplain to give the sermon at the Evensong service on May 4. Although it was to take place on Rogation Sunday—a time of prayer for "the needs of mankind (especially employment), the fruits of earth and labor," the Chaplain explained—he did not bind me to the day's traditions. Rather, he encouraged me to base my sermon on reflections that grew out of my work as a medical sociologist. I decided to devote it to the religious import of the intense preoccupation with so-called medical-ethical or bioethical quandaries and dilemmas that has occurred during the last several decades, both in the United Kingdom and in the United States. Below the surface of these concerns about the problematic concomitants of certain advances in biology and medicine, I suggested, lay questions of origin and destiny, self and relatedness, and the meaning of life and the mystery of death, which are as religious as they are moral. And I called upon those attending the service to ponder why such questions are being raised so continually and pervasively around matters of health, illness, and medicine in societies like ours, which are supposedly modern (even postmodern), scientifically oriented, and secularized.

Balliol Chapel is not one of Oxford's oldest, nor one of its most splendid. But it is a vital center of Balliol life, with a Chaplain who is concerned about the welfare of everyone in the College community. It has an enthusiastic choir (if one less renowned than those of Christ Church, Magdalen, and New College) of female as well as male voices,

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with a fine repertoire of sacred choral music and a College Organ Scholar to accompany it.

Dressed in my gown, I delivered my sermon from a seventeenth-century pulpit near the ornate, silver-gilt altar. I could see and feel the quiet loveliness and prayerfulness of the Chapel, with its rows of well-filled pews facing each other across the black-and-white marble floor, its walnut paneling and ancient stained glass windows, the religious paintings on its whitewashed walls, the candelabra chandeliers suspended from its vaulted ceiling. At the end of the service, after the choir had sung "Like as the hart," we gathered in the Old Common Room for sherry. The next day, I found in my pigeonhole a note of thanks from the Chaplain. It was signed, "Yours aye."

The more familiar I became with Oxford and England, the more unlike the other worlds in which I moved I felt them to be. British English was sufficiently different from American English to delight me, and also, if I wanted to be sure to catch all its nuances, to oblige me to listen almost as attentively as I did to French. Each of the several times during the academic year that I traveled to and from France via the high-speed Eurostar Chunnel trains, I realized how much separated the United Kingdom from Continental Europe besides the English Channel and the decision of the British government not to join the European Union or adopt Europe's new currency, the Euro.

And where but in England would my clock radio have awakened me on a mid-February morning with a featured story about a black swan who was mourning the loss of her mate and yearning for a new one? The plaintive sound of the swan's grieving call was broadcast on television as well as radio, and the swan keeper responsible for the pond and the surrounding woods where she dwelt was interviewed about the failed attempts to persuade her to mate with a male white swan. The driver of a taxi that I took that day, who had heard the newscast about the sorrowful swan, informed me that swans were protected by very old British laws that also entrusted them, as property, to the reigning monarch.

Visiting the Balliol College Archives furthered my sense of the uniqueness of British culture and history. In the centuries-old College Registers, in beautiful penmanship and Latin script, the names of generations of Balliol students were inscribed, accompanied by their birth order, their social "station," and sometimes their father's occupation. Among these I noted Adam Smith, the great moral philosopher and economist, who came from Glasgow University with a Snell "Exhibition" (a fixed allowance given to scholars) to study at Balliol from 1740 to 1746. Account books dating from the beginning of the English civil war in 1642 recorded that Balliol lent most of its dwindling cash reserves to the king "by the unanimous consent" of the Master and Fellows, and that when they

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were exhausted, eighty-two pounds of the College's plate silver and twenty-six pounds of its silver gilt were surrendered to "his Majestie," who melted them down and minted them as coinage to pay his soldiers. I also saw parchment scrolls that listed the results of the election of early Masters of the College. Then, as now, these elections were held in the Chapel. The Chapel, I learned, had been the repository for the College's accountancy books and its bags of money until the eighteenth century, when banks were first established in England. There were biographical entries about old members of the College in the Archives that reached into the history of the British colonial empire. Some of these contained information that was not only exotic but lugubrious—like the items about the strangely coincidental successive deaths of two Balliol alumni assigned to the Foreign Service in India. The entry for the first of these men ends with the simple line, "Punjab 1885—ate by tiger"; and in another part of the same book, twelve months later, the entry about the second Balliol man concludes, "Punjab 1886—ate by tiger." No evidence is recorded about whether they were both eaten by the *same* tiger.

On a summer day in early July, I "came down" from Oxford. As my car pulled away from Eastman House for the last time, and moved swiftly past Balliol College en route to Heathrow Airport and my American life, I felt as if I were leaving a convent-enclosed community whose gates had closed behind me forever, or perhaps traveling away from an irretrievable mirage. But what has journeyed with me is both enduring and real: a reservoir of images and memories, of nostalgia and puzzlement, and of lasting relationships in both the "upstairs" College world of the Senior Common Room and the "downstairs" world of its domestic staff. And now, when I read a newspaper article about the decision of the House of Lords, after much debate, to allow the Lord Chancellor to wear modern black trousers, socks, and shoes rather than slim black breeches, stockings, and buckled patent-leather shoes when he is presiding over the House of Lords in a white periwig and a voluminous seventeenth-century gown; when I notice how many of the writers for *The New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books* are British (including some I met during my Eastman year); when I catch a rerun of an Inspector Morse mystery story on PBS, filmed in the streets and colleges of Oxford; and when I hear church music sung by a British chapel choir—it is not only recognition that I experience but also a pang of retrospective affection.

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Swan Songs

STEVEN G. KELLMAN

When I was young, my fondest wish—beyond fleeting fantasies as cowboy, fireman, or center fielder—was to be old. Oh, to be as ancient and oracular as Norman Thomas, who, at seventy-nine, spoke to my high school history club! Annealed by multiple defeats in a lost but lustrous cause, the Socialist-Who-Would-Have-Been-President stood before us: wispy, white-haired, almost saintly, purged of banality by the aura of longevity. Though I no longer remember any words that Thomas said, I would have given fifteen larks to be that wise old owl. I longed for a gray beard, who could not yet shave.

Time is the catalyst that separates grape juice from vintage wine. After a certain age, even witless Dennis Rodman might rebound as a sage. When I was young, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Bertrand Russell, and Igor Stravinsky still walked the earth, and I longed to interrogate them about cosmic mysteries. To clueless youth, seniority is sagacity; trust no one under seventy.

"What is the answer?" asked Gertrude Stein, dying. When Alice Toklas did not reply, Stein delivered her final thoughts: "In that case, what is the question?" To Platonists, there is revelation in every deathbed utterance, because death, like birth, is closest to divinity. The child is father to the man, claimed Wordsworth, but the grandfather, reaching beyond this world, has something to teach each. Yet I am drawn to the parting words of the elderly, not because I believe in an afterlife but because the imminence of extinction may energize organisms it has not already enervated.

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Eager to record the obituary dicta of moribund grandees, Victorian ladies and gentlemen used to attend their closing throes, hovering over the bedstead with pen and pad in hand. Even after careers of pedantry and prattle, all professors become emeriti in their parting breaths. And those who audit the concluding lecture expect something more inspirational than Giacomo Puccini's dying request for fresh water or Lewis Carroll's final stage direction: "Take away the pillows." Just before expiring, the hypochondriacal Joseph Conrad advised his son Borys, "You know I am *really* ill this time."

But Goethe had more in mind than extra candles when, fading, he proclaimed, *"Mehr licht!"* More light. Those minding Thomas Alva Edison were hardly disappointed when the incandescent inventor exited after observing, "It is very beautiful over there." But the finest specimen of the genre is Oscar Wilde's remark, "This wallpaper is killing me; one of us has got to go." Wilde's adieu strikes me as entirely too elegant to be improvisational. A masterpiece of studied spontaneity, the pronouncement must have been composed in advance, polished and preserved until precisely the right moment. But imagine the agony of a miscalculation! What if, after delivering the consummate final line, you live on for hours, weeks, even years—in mute mortification over premature valediction? What if you are so eager to attain wisdom that you long to skip the lengthy middle years of apprehension? There is nothing more preposterous than a fifteen-year-old's memoir . . . except the deathbed statement he devises in anticipation of the distinguished occasion.

The rest is silence.

I been there before.

It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known.

. . . and yes I said yes I will Yes.

Isn't it pretty to think so?

And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when at the end of the ride their daughter got up first and stretched her young body.

They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow / Through Eden took their solitary way.

After all, tomorrow is another day.

I stop somewhere waiting for you.

A text's best line is often its last. Likening nature to a meticulous author, Cicero insisted that "it makes no sense to believe that she would be at great pains to map out the earlier parts of life and then, like a lazy playwright, give the last act a careless once-over." The Roman orator was assassinated in his early sixties, a bit too green to pass for a genuine sage. However, Cicero attributes to Cato the Elder, who died a century earlier

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at eighty-five, the mellow thoughts on aging that he records in *De Senectute,* the locus classicus of gerontophilia. It is a book designed to amplify the anguish of any youth impatient with our species' system of deferred enlightenment. Like Ecclesiastes, Cicero's Cato does note that "each season of life has an advantage peculiarly its own." But he argues that the best comes last, when, liberated from the demands of mating and attaining, the individual can think freely and serenely. "For it is among the old," Cato claims, "that thought, reason, and deliberation are to be found; if there had never been any old men, there would never have been any civilization at all." Sigmund Freud would certainly agree, while noting that the old are discontent. "I am not young enough to know everything," quipped Wilde, old enough to know *that.*

When raw, I craved nothing but ripeness. Adolescent anxiety over the puzzling imperatives of sexuality must have been a factor in my zeal to pass beyond baffling passion to wise serenity. Yet, even as I coveted the cognizance of Tiresias, he who foresuffered all, I recognized that not every ancient is oracular. Mel Brooks's Two-Thousand-Year-Old Man substitutes boundless flippancy for omniscience. While envying Ernest Gaines's Miss Jane Pittman, Thomas Berger's Little Big Man, and Allan Gurganus's Oldest Living Confederate Widow, I conceded that certain specimens of human antiquity wheezed and groaned and reeked. They forgot my name, and their own as well. They seemed incapable of wonder or mischief or elation. Like Alberto Giacometti's wizened sticks, they offered an image of diminished possibility, of life scarcely distinguishable from extinction.

"When he's forsaken, /" wrote Thomas Hood, "Withered and shaken, / What can an old man do but die?" He can write.

According to legend, and little else, Solomon wrote the Song of Songs in lusty youth, Proverbs in prudent middle age, and Ecclesiastes as the mellow fruit of his final years. To everything there is a season, quoth the Preacher, but I have always preferred his more seasoned sooth to the soupy drool of the Song of Songs or the gritless homily of Proverbs. If ancient Solomon had verily believed that all is vanity, he would never have bothered to lift quill to vellum. Yet tradition says he did, magnificently, autumnally, if only to bemoan the futility of it all. Of making books there is no end, laments Ecclesiastes, but many of the brightest books are made in sight of the finish line.

"You are not required to finish" is the Talmudic dictum that Henry Roth appropriated as the epigraph to *Requiem for Harlem,* a novel that was published two years after its author's death in 1995, at the age of eighty-nine. *Requiem for Harlem* is one of six volumes, totaling 3,200 manuscript pages, that Roth, crippled by rheumatoid arthritis and deep depression, felt compelled to finish during his ninth decade. His crepus-

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cular creativity, in the autobiographical fictional cycle he called *Mercy of a Rude Stream,* is one of the most extraordinary episodes in twentieth-century American literary history.

"One might as well call it sleep. He shut his eyes." Those words close Roth's prodigious first novel. Published in 1934, when its author was twenty-eight, *Call It Sleep* soon fell out of print and into literary oblivion. By 1964, when the book was re-issued to vast acclaim, Roth was subsisting in Maine, slaughtering waterfowl. Convinced that his artistry was dead, Roth had become an artist of death, the self-taught scourge of rural poultry. Abruptly rich and famous at the age of fifty-eight, he was not ready to resume a thwarted literary career. One might as well call it sleep, and Roth had given up. However, despite suicidal despondency after the death of his wife, Muriel, in 1990, he felt obliged to finish. In 1994, sixty years after *Call It Sleep* appeared, Roth published his second novel, *A Star Shines over Mt. Morris Park.*

It would be lovely to be able to say that, after enduring a legendary writer's block long enough to lodge all the grubs in Greenwich Village, Roth finally found serenity in the renewed flow of words. He did not. Narrated by an octogenarian novelist very like Roth himself, the autobiographical *Mercy of a Rude Stream,* which virtually revels in painful revelations of incest, is a lacerating exercise in self-contempt, and the series title's acronym, MORS, means death. *Apothanein Thelo*—I wish to die—is the motto, borrowed from the Cumaean Sibyl, that the ancient author within Roth's story hangs in his study in New Mexico. Roth's eighty-nine-year trajectory, from Galicia to New York to Maine to Albuquerque, was classically Greek in both abomination and cathartic redemption. His concluding, excruciating labor gave life to his self-loathing, even as it put to rest an old man's mortal pain. Sophocles, who wrote *Oedipus at Colonus* at eighty-one, could not have invented a more melancholy denouement.

"Some people are born posthumously," noted Friedrich Nietzsche. And some are reborn at eighty, the age at which Giuseppe Verdi composed *Falstaff.* Leopold von Ranke began his magisterial *History of the World* at eighty and completed its tenth volume just before his death at ninety-one. For the posthumous artist (and does not every authentic artist aim to make contemporaries of posterity?), every book deserves the title of François de Chateaubriand's last, most awesome one, *Memoirs from Beyond the Tomb.* If the dead don't know, who does? Goethe was eighty-one when he finally finished *Faust,* and Thomas Hardy, who relinquished fiction at fifty, was eighty-five when he wrote his last, and lasting, poems. "All I have produced before the age of seventy is not worth taking into account," wrote the Japanese painter Katsushika Hokusai, at seventy-five. "At ninety I shall penetrate the mystery of things; at a hundred I shall certainly have reached a marvelous stage; and when I am a hundred and ten everything I do, be it a dot or a line, will be alive."

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When Hokusai died at ninety, in 1849, he left some mysteries unsolved.

A child's longing for enlightened senescence can masquerade as precocity. A tot who favors the late motets of Heinrich Schütz or who reads Thomas Mann, author of three major novels after seventy, is thought to be sagacious beyond his years. He might merely be a prig. But in a juventocracy, where an aged man is but a paltry thing, a faith in late eloquence might also serve as consolation for early disappointment. If I could not be Arthur Rimbaud, who had exhausted the possibilities of poetry by the age of nineteen, perhaps I could still be Miguel de Cervantes, nearly sixty when he began *Don Quixote*. If not now, then.

In the culture of the callow, though, novice achievement is the only kind that counts. Raymond Radiguet secured a place in French literature despite—because of?—the fact that, after writing two remarkable novels, he died at twenty. Sylvia Plath's case for canonization was not impaired by her failure to survive beyond thirty. John Keats wrote "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" at twenty, and, dying at twenty-five, did not linger for a second look. The example of Thomas Chatterton, who began writing at twelve and hanged himself at eighteen, inspired William Wordsworth to promulgate the Romantic Law of Artistic Decline: "We Poets in our youth begin in gladness; / But thereof come in the end despondency and madness." In literary matters, insist the Dionysians, never trust anyone over thirty; a seasoned hand might, like Wordsworth, be doddering.

Nor is the principle of creative atrophy confined to consumptive poets and self-consuming rock musicians. Much of the history of mathematics is a saga of prodigies who were over the hill before they had license to drive around it. Carl Friedrich Gauss made many of his crucial contributions to number theory before reaching twenty. The self-taught genius Srinivasa Ramanujan made his remarkable discoveries in function theory, power series, and number theory long before his death at thirty-one. Facility in abstract thought demands not only the energy and audacity most abundant in robust youth but also detachment from the messy minutiae that accumulate with years. "A person who has not made his great contribution to science before the age of thirty will never do so," declared Albert Einstein, who was still in his twenties when he developed the special theory of relativity, mastered quantum theory, and explained the photoelectric effect. Yet for me, the rumpled old émigré of Princeton who, in oddly inflected English, spouted abstruse formulas and preached world peace was, until his death at seventy-six, the very prototype of the sage dispensing arcane truths. I yearned to grow up and grow old so that I, too, might decipher the cosmic design. If wisdom is less purely conceptual than a matter of sifting and weighing experience, then there is a higher discipline to which persons under the age of sixty are not admit-

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ted. Talmudic pupils are cautioned about the perils of studying Cabala prematurely; trying to make sense of the mystical obscurities of the Zohar at too tender an age could shake the foundations of personal faith. Now, forty years later, I believe less in Gatsby's green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us anyway, than in the lucency of twilight.

Altersstil is a term that, conceding majesty to seniority (and authority to German), art historians have applied to the distinctive style of aging masters. Jean-Michel Basquiat, done in at twenty-seven by a heroin overdose in 1988, might be the current rage, but others, who managed, sometimes despite crippling illness, to produce major pieces shortly before extinction at advanced ages, have never lost their savor. The monumental *Water Lilies* that arthritic Claude Monet executed months before his death at eighty-six are among the glories of modern painting. Ninety-two-year-old Frank Lloyd Wright was designing the Guggenheim Museum when he died. Donatello continued to create extraordinary work until his demise at eighty, as did Francisco Goya until eighty-two, Henri Matisse until eighty-five, Frans Hals until eighty-six, Titian and Louise Nevelson until eighty-eight, Rufino Tamayo until ninety-one, Georgia O'Keeffe until ninety-nine. Is there something, other than durable DNA, that they had in common? In *The Artist Grows Old* (1972), a discussion of geriatric creativity, Kenneth Clark identifies these characteristics: "A sense of isolation, a feeling of holy rage, developing into what I have called transcendental pessimism; a mistrust of reason, a belief in instinct." In a 1986 essay, Rudolf Arnheim contends that *Altersstil* is marked by looser brush strokes, a detachment from practical concerns, an abandonment of interest in causal connections. Though Ludwig van Beethoven left life at a mere fifty-seven, his final chamber music evokes the sublime lucidity of an artist old and wise enough to cast aside the trite. Any child can be morose, but "transcendental pessimism" is the unique achievement of advanced maturity. I prefer Beethoven's parting five quartets and the *Grösse Fuge,* op. 133 in B-flat major, to the sweetly ebullient String Octet, op. 20 in E-flat major, that Felix Mendelssohn composed when he was sixteen. "Man must suffer to be wise," proclaims the Chorus in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon.* Mere pain is not the same as suffering; it lacks longevity.

Though all testify to the telling truth that it ain't over till it's over, it is surely important to distinguish among different sorts of *Altersstil.* Some artists, like Igor Stravinsky and Richard Strauss, who were still composing when they died at eighty-nine and eighty-five, respectively, are steadily productive throughout a long career. The creative lives of others exhibit a beginning and an end, yet miss the middle: Henry Roth went sixty years between novels, and eighty-seven-year-old Helen Hooven Santmyer rushed into print with . . . *And Ladies of the Club* (1982) fifty-three years after her second novel, *The Fierce Dispute* (1929). Still others, like the

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narrator of Marcel Proust's consummate and consummating novel, redeem a long, squandered life by trysting with the Muse before an inevitable rendezvous with death. It was only after retiring, at fifty-nine, as headmistress of the Bryn Mawr School for Girls, that Edith Hamilton, productive until ninety-one, started to write her popular books on classical mythology and culture. An illiterate shepherd until he began his studies at forty, Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph managed, before his assassination at eighty-five, to become the leading architect of rabbinical Judaism. Though each is redolent of patient growth, the fragrance of a late bloomer surely differs from that of a seasoned perennial. Voltaire, prolific to the end, which came in his eighty-fourth year, represents a different type from that of Virginia Hamilton Adair, who published her first book of poems, *Ants on the Melon* (1996), when she was eighty-three. Yet each case admonishes the ne'er-do-well never to say ne'er; while the breath still lingers, so does the possibility of filling the air with something aromatic. As Tennyson's Ulysses proclaims:

> Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
> Death closes all: but something ere the end,
> Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
> Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

Though it wastes the brain, death does concentrate the mind. And I would not mind finding the kind of concentration that William Butler Yeats mustered in his final, passionate, gerontophobic poems.

Because they lack formal training and usually encouragement, so-called primitive artists often begin their labors after most people are retired. Grandma Moses created her more than one thousand canvases between her late seventies and her death at 101. William Edmondson, a son of slaves, began a sculpting career in his sixties; Morris Hirshfield, an immigrant Jewish tailor, taught himself to paint at sixty-five; the Englishman Alfred Wallis commenced painting at sixty-seven, only a decade before his death. In the last century, the Japanese artist Sengai began at sixty-one and died at eighty-seven.

Several scholarly tomes—including W. A. Newman Dorland's *The Age of Mental Virility: An Inquiry into the Records of Achievement of the World's Chief Workers and Thinkers* (1908), Harvey C. Lehman's *Age and Achievement* (1953), and Hugo Munsterberg's *The Crown of Life: Artistic Creativity in Old Age* (1983)—attempt to create a science of geriatric achievement, computing the chronological mean of peak performance for men and women in dozens of fields. Lehman's empirical studies, for example, reveal an earlier prime for mathematicians and chemists than for geologists, biologists, and social scientists, and find that philosophers write their best books between thirty and thirty-nine. Detailed charts provide a graphic

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sense of the flow and ebb of human élan. Yet I learned more about late creativity from reading Rabindranath Tagore's deathbed poems or comparing the *Pietà* that Michelangelo was working on when he died, in his ninetieth year, with the one he executed more than six decades earlier.

Paris in the twenties exhilarated Malcolm Cowley in his twenties, and he carved a literary career out of remembering it. But he also made a book, *The View from Eighty* (1980), out of outliving his cohorts; it is an eloquent reflection on the ravages of age whose very eloquence defies and denies those ravages. But just as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1950) can be said to inaugurate contemporary literary feminism, her gloomy disquisition *The Coming of Age* (1970), published when she was sixty-two, anticipates recent personal writing on aging. I would call these volumes memoirs, except that they look not to the past and certainly not to an undependable future; rather they gaze—soberly, lucidly, tonically—at the shriveled present. Perhaps because women tend to live longer than men and because conventions of beauty oppress older women more than they do their male contemporaries, the most engaging recent reflections on aging have been written by women. Flouting the old youth culture's mistrust of antiquity, the Turning-Seventy-Meditation has become a lively, if often crabby, contribution to current letters.

Though their sub-genre lacks the fury of ancient Lear standing on the stormy heath, the elderly women who confront the ruthlessness of chronology forbid us to sentimentalize the aging process. In *At Seventy: A Journal* (1984), May Sarton is by turns peevish, envious, aching, and weary—though neither aching nor weary enough to prevent her from publishing a verse sequel, *Coming into Eighty: New Poems* (1994), exactly ten years later. In *Coming into the End Zone: A Memoir* (1991), Doris Grumbach uses the occasion of attaining the biblical limit of three score and ten to flaunt her aversions to photography, seasons, speed, travel, and people. In *The Last Gift of Time* (1997), Carolyn Heilbrun, who is Sarton's literary executor, reveals at age seventy-one how she violated her own resolution to die before seventy. "I find it powerfully reassuring now to think of life as borrowed time," she remarks. "I daily choose life more earnestly because it is a choice." We are, of course, all always dying, but when the memoirs of youngsters dominate the culture, I am grateful that some choose to spend their dwindled time wrestling with words. "Every time those of us in our last decades allow a memory to occur," contends Heilbrun, "we forget to look at what is in front of us." Nostalgia is a narcotic of the young; the old face what's left cold sober.

William Shakespeare, who abjured his own rough magic four years before his death at fifty-two, attests that what's left is not much. "When the age is in," contends Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*, "the wit is out." Yet nonagenarian George Burns did not lack for wit when he promised a centenary comic gig that he, turning one hundred just before his

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death, was too ill to give. In *As You Like It,* Jaques prophesies that life will end "sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing." What to make of a diminished thing is the compelling question posed by "The Oven Bird" of Robert Frost, a poet productive into his eighty-ninth year. Demographics indicate that it is a question confronting more and more of us. The population of the United States has never been older. Nine percent (24,268,000) have outlived three score years and ten, and the percentage is expected to double by the middle of the next century.

Old age is my Walden Pond, to which I hope to go to live what's left deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and to see if I can learn what it has to teach—and find the means to reveal it. At fifty-two, I am already old enough to know that gray is not always keener than green and that incontinence, not omniscience, is the likelier fate of marathon survivors. Granted immortality but not eternal youth, Tithonus was as miserable as the Struldbrugs, who lived in perpetual tedium on Jonathan Swift's Luggnagg. I nonetheless cling to the hope of rising to a gray eminence, a mature mountain from whose majestic summit few young climbers ever gaze.

Is there something morbid about a youngster's lifelong envy of the canny old? Even into middle age, I have rooted for the superannuated athlete, for heroic performances by Satchel Paige, George Blanda, George Foreman. While their faded bodies attract our sympathy, old underdogs can also teach young observers novel tricks. Now that no major league baseball player possesses a birth date earlier than mine, my interest in the game has waned.

The separate commandments to "Honor thy father and thy mother" and "Know thyself" make sense in stable societies where parental identities are more certain than one's own. Most cultures inculcate respect for elders, if for no other reason than as a means of enforcing social control. Allocating power according to seniority is only slightly less arbitrary than allocating it according to skin tone, but at least mortality enforces term limitations on movie discounts. Most codgers, like most mere cinquanters, command respect as human beings more than as sages. However, the Elders of the Tribe, a group whose roster is perforce as fluid as a leaky bladder, are a special case of veterans who merit veneration. Norman Thomas was retired from the club thirty years ago, but current members surely include Jacques Barzun, Saul Bellow, Ingmar Bergman, Gwendolyn Brooks, Elliot Carter, Leslie Fiedler, John Kenneth Galbraith, Philip Johnson, Pauline Kael, Naguib Mahfouz, Nelson Mandela, Arthur Miller, Czeslaw Milosz, Albert Murray, Tillie Olsen, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Ruth Stone, Studs Terkel, and Eudora Welty. That parliament of owls would be a brilliant legislature, a gathering of canny birds that makes an exaltation.

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

Acupuncture in the Operating Room

SHERWIN B. NULAND

Since 1985, I have made a series of journeys to China. Most were undertaken while I was the chairman of the Yale-China Association's medical committee, whose purpose is to oversee a long-standing relationship between the Yale School of Medicine and the Hunan Medical University in Changsha, a city in south-central China. Like many American physicians, I had become intrigued during that time by what I read of the complex surgical operations being done in the People's Republic with only the use of acupuncture to prevent pain, and I had tried to determine whether such surgery without anesthesia is possible. I had begun my quest in Changsha itself and pursued it in Beijing and Shanghai. What I observed with my own eyes and what I learned through a considerable amount of reading and consultation convinced me that these matters were to be taken seriously.

Before the widespread use of ether as anesthesia after 1846, a number of techniques had been used by surgeons in an attempt to produce some measure of insensibility during operations, the most successful of which involved the ingestion of naturally occurring opiates. Hypnosis, alcohol intoxication, and even a punch in the jaw were well-known methods of inducing stupor, but were often either unreliable or unsafe. The introduction of ether and nitrous oxide, and then chloroform in 1847, ended the long search for pain-free surgery; in the last century and a half, and especially in the past fifty years, there has been little need to seek alternative methods. The field of anesthesiology has expanded until it is now one of the most sophisticated of all medical specialties, and this has vastly widened the surgeon's horizons.

But in at least one technologically disadvantaged nation, the search for simpler techniques continued. Until recently, neither the equipment nor the training for contemporary anesthetic methods was easy to come by in the People's Republic of China. The government of the China I used to visit between 1985 and 1991 was besieged by economic, political, and demographic problems to which it appeared to assign higher priority than to the health of individual citizens.

In 1958, Mao Zedong decreed that traditional Chinese medicine be re-evaluated in such a way as to incorporate it into the methods of the West, and vice versa. "Make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China," he famously declared. The most dramatic, and best-known, result of this edict was the introduction of the age-old technique of acupuncture into the repertoire of the anesthesiologist. Although acupuncture needles had been used to alleviate pain and symptoms of disease for thousands of years, there is no evidence of their employment in surgery before Mao's dictum.

The acupuncture idea immediately captured the imagination of Westerners, and some were initially prepared to accept the most extravagant success stories that reached their ears. But after the first excitement, conflicting reports of effectiveness began drifting back to the United States and Europe. In the early 1970s, neuroscientists in various countries organized delegations to visit medical centers in the People's Republic in order to obtain firsthand impressions.

A blue-ribbon study panel of a dozen Americans, sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences in May 1974, was by every criterion the best qualified of the delegations.

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Its members were expected to provide a definitive response to the charge given them: "To determine how effective this technique is for the prevention or alleviation of pain during surgical procedures." However, after three weeks, during which they visited sixteen hospitals, all that these scientists and clinicians could agree on was that for *some* patients, under *some* social and psychological circumstances, undergoing *some* operations, acupuncture was effective. At best, they suggested, the method might be useful in 10 percent of all surgical cases.

Investigators charged with the intimidating responsibility of verifying a controversial phenomenon like to leave themselves a well-known escape route: they suggest further studies. The brain trust of neuroscientists studying acupuncture was no exception. They recommended that acupuncture anesthesia be further investigated by what they called "well-controlled clinical trials." Although this meant that they had not dismissed the possibility of the technique's usefulness, the average surgeon eagerly awaiting some conclusive word about acupuncture anesthesia was left as much in the dark as before.

I was among those awaiters. On one of my visits, I asked some serious questions of several of the Chinese colleagues I had come to know reasonably well. After returning home, I asked the same questions of a few of the Changsha physicians who were studying at my hospital in New Haven as well as of several Americans who had visited Chinese medical facilities. As my secondhand impressions accumulated, I began to believe that there was a definite role for surgical acupuncture when it was used under very specific conditions. Returning to the neuroscientists' report, I saw that it contained data and observations that could support such a conclusion but that the committee, out of either caution or irresolution, had been reluctant to reach it.

I decided to appoint myself a one-man court of inquiry. I was hardly a blue-ribbon panel, for I am neither a neuroscientist nor an anesthesiologist but, rather, an ordinary general surgeon—that is, a surgeon whose operations are limited to the digestive organs, the breast, and the thyroid gland. By that time, however, I did have a comfortable familiarity with a few hospitals in the People's Republic, and, in addition, I had become accustomed to Chinese politeness and the filter of seemingly deliberate obscurity through which everything in that country must be evaluated. I chose to do my personal study in three hospitals in widely separated parts of China, and I sought the help of surgeons with whom I had worked before and with whom I shared long-range interests. I had good reason to believe that they would provide me with an untainted view. I was determined, moreover, to evaluate the accusation of an American urologist friend who warned me one day in an OR locker room, "I know what they do. Somebody told me they slip in a lot of narcotic when you're not looking. The whole thing's a fake."

The first colleague I planned to visit was Dr. Yan Zhangshou, a professor of surgery at the Hunan Medical University with whom I had established a close professional bond on a previous visit. We were men of the same surgical generation and had found plenty of fascinating notes to compare on our first encounter as well as in subsequent letters. When my train pulled into the Changsha railroad station, Yan was waiting on the platform. We didn't try to conceal our pleasure at seeing each other, and there was a great deal to discuss as we slowly drove through the densely crowded streets of the grimy factory city.

When Yan told me that he had asked one of his colleagues to schedule a thyroid operation under acupuncture for the following morning, he made it clear that this was not an unusual performance, since acupuncture was his hospital's preferred anesthetic technique for thyroid surgery. "In some hospitals, the surgeons don't like it," he said. "In the first place, it's not really anesthesia at all. Even people who use that word realize that it doesn't really *relieve* pain. All it can do is raise the patient's ability to *tolerate* the pain—his threshold. And for some kinds of pain it doesn't even do a good job of that. We can open a belly with it, but when we begin to pull the intestines around, things become very uncomfortable and the patient always feels nausea—sometimes he vomits. So it's never used for abdominal surgery anymore."

Yan went on to explain that the abdomen is

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not the only area of the body that presents problems. When a conscious patient is submitted to chest surgery under acupuncture, he must be trained beforehand to control the flow of air into his lungs. Learning to do that takes a lot of instruction, and although many patients can master it, proper breathing under acupuncture is just one more thing for the surgeon and the anesthesiologist to worry about. At the very least, the training delays the operation for a week or more. After some years of variable experience with operations in the chest and abdomen, the method was abandoned as introducing too many risks.

There are two areas of the body where there are no problems of the sort that can be presented by the intestine and the lungs. One of them is the head. In the surgery of brain tumors, Yan told me, acupuncture continued to enjoy some degree of popularity. The other area is the neck, most particularly the lower part of the throat, where the thyroid gland rests its plump, U-shaped fleshiness on the series of cartilage rings that form the skeleton of the larynx, or upper windpipe. The operation I was scheduled to observe was a subtotal thyroidectomy, in which a diseased part of the gland is cut away from the remaining healthy tissue.

When Yan and I arrived at the First Affiliated Hospital of the Hunan Medical University on the following morning, the team of surgeons was just beginning its preparation to remove a two-inch mass from the thyroid gland of Hou Lihui, a thirty-four-year-old woman who worked in one of the many factories of Changsha. When I had written to Yan Zhangshou to tell him that I wanted to see a thyroid operation under acupuncture, her name had been chosen from the list of waiting patients, and she had been admitted a week before I arrived.

During that week, nothing in particular had been done to prepare Mrs. Hou for her operation. She was not visited by the anesthesiologist until the day prior to surgery, and even then her entire period of orientation took less than thirty minutes. Acupuncture is, of course, well known to Chinese patients, even though its use during surgery goes back only forty years. The anesthesiologist gave her a few suggestions about relaxation and taught her some breathing techniques that might make the procedure less taxing. He promised that she would have only minimal discomfort, or perhaps no discomfort at all.

In the earlier days of surgery under acupuncture, patients were often indoctrinated with the notion that Chairman Mao and the Communist nation would be somehow glorified by each of Chinese medicine's individual victories. Such preoperative political pep talks were abandoned long ago, but in the People's Republic, acupuncture remains a method of treatment with which patients feel motivated to cooperate fully. Hou Lihui was no exception. She had known of the method since childhood and was as familiar with it as an American is with penicillin shots for strep throat. She had confidence in the hospital, and when the doctors told her she would feel little or no pain during her operation, she took them at their word.

An hour before surgery, a nurse had injected into the muscle of Mrs. Hou's buttock a dose of 40 milligrams of phenobarbital, a barbiturate whose mild action is usually effective for about five hours. As the anesthesiologist, Dr. Xu Qiming, inserted an intravenous line in his patient's left forearm for the infusion of a slow drip of saline solution, he explained to me how he had chosen the acupuncture points he would use. "There are fourteen channels in the body, and we will use two today," he said. "To get a proper result in the front of the neck, we need to make an effect on the liver channel and the stomach channel." These channels, both of which travel across the region of the thyroid gland and are the pathways through which the energy known as *chi* is thought to course, can be accessed at any of a number of points along their extensive length. Different acupuncturists do this in different ways, Xu explained, "but I like the point called Taichong, between the first and second metatarsals, for the liver channel. For the stomach channel, I use Xiangu, between the second and third metatarsals."

Xu sterilized the tops of Mrs. Hou's feet with an iodine solution, and at each of his four chosen points he inserted through her skin a very fine five-inch-long stainless steel needle. He then connected each needle to a small battery to provide what he described as a low-

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frequency, low-intensity current. "You can buy one of these cheap in a store in downtown Changsha," he said. As the surgical drapes were put in place, Mrs. Hou was given an intravenous dose of 40 milligrams of Demerol and 4 milligrams of droperidol, a tranquilizing sedative that counteracts nausea. Even for a petite woman, these are small to moderate amounts, and they seemed to have little effect on the level of her consciousness. From here on in, the patient herself was generally ignored, except when I directed a question to her through one of the doctors. Her pulse and blood pressure were monitored, and occasional calming words were spoken to her by Xu or his assistant, but otherwise she might just as well have been asleep, sitting partially upright in the standard position for thyroid surgery. A constant stream of conversation was kept up among the staff, much of it the same kind of simple social discourse that is heard in any OR in the world. No attempt was made to generate the cocoon-like atmosphere of quiet reassurance that some theorists believe to be a major factor in the successful application of surgical acupuncture.

Just before making his incision, the surgeon tested the level of pain control, more for my benefit than for his or the patient's—he already knew what the result would be. He picked up a bit of the skin of Mrs. Hou's throat in the serrated tip of a particularly brutal tool called a Kocher clamp and closed the instrument's jaws tightly. Having once or twice had a fingertip snapped up in the vise of a Kocher clamp wielded by an overzealous assistant, I can attest to the agonizing pain it causes, but Mrs. Hou did not so much as flicker an eyelash. Yan smiled broadly as he looked over and saw me shaking my head in disbelief. The patient's lack of response could in no way be attributable to the modest dose of narcotic she had been given; there was clearly some other process at work.

The surgeons worked slowly and meticulously. When the last skin stitch was inserted two and a half hours after the procedure began, Mrs. Hou was just as serene as she had been at the outset. Except for a few fleeting moments of moderate discomfort that she would later describe as a "pinching" sensation, her only complaint had been that maintaining her semi-upright position for so long had been difficult. In deference to my New Haven urologist colleague, I had watched the intravenous line carefully, as well as the movements of everyone in the room. Other than the relatively small quantities of barbiturate and narcotic given to the patient before the start of the operation, she had received no drug that could possibly have had any effect on the pain that should have been caused by two and a half hours of surgical excavation in the sensitive tissues of her neck. Wide awake and smiling at the conclusion of the procedure, she suffered no anesthetic aftereffects. Were it not for the dressing, she would have been indistinguishable from her roommates in the ward, who were awaiting surgery. A few days later, I visited Hou Lihui while making rounds with the surgical team. She had required no postoperative pain medication.

The following week, I saw the same operation done with equal success at the Peking Union Medical College Hospital in Beijing, using different acupuncture points. My guide through that procedure was the retired chief of cardiothoracic surgery, Dr. Xu Letian, who, in the early days of its surgical application, had used acupuncture in all manner of chest operations, including open heart surgery. Like Yan, he had no certain explanation for the method's effectiveness, or at least none that was yet sufficiently definitive to satisfy a scientifically trained physician unprepared to accept the existence of *chi* and channels. But as he and I both knew, Chinese and Western researchers have provided some tentative answers to the riddle, and these will be the topic of my next column.

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JOURNAL

Beijing 1988

DEBORAH GOLUB

In 1988, while in Beijing as an exchange professor of psychology, Deborah Golub was confined without explanation to her room for a week. During her confinement, which took place a year before the Tiananmen Square massacre, her liaison in the United States was told that she was quarantined because of illness, and communications with her home university were intercepted.

David's letter got through. Unaware of my situation, he rambled on about Gaudí's unfinished cathedral in Barcelona. The corner of the envelope has been torn. The censors delicately coiled its contents around a thin wire in order to remove the letter. A translator has written Chinese characters above the expression "mind blowing." Then the person rolled and flattened the pages back into place but out of order.

A few days ago, the censors accidently removed a page from my mother's letter and substituted one in Finnish. Hers was the first letter the cadres gave me; David's is the second. The textured paper smelled of coffee and pine sap, a strange intruder inside my mother's envelope, filled with jagged *v*'s and *k*'s. However, I have caressed the page for the lonely Finn somewhere in this city.

I am losing track of time, sitting motionless on the edge of my bed, sending my body into Spain. Fine yellow-gray sand from Mongolia blows, winter cold, through the gaping spaces of window frame and swirls around my room, miniature dust devils that hop from chair to bed. The powder settles momentarily on loose calendar pages they have given me. The calendar is old. Each tissue-paper day is stamped with an ink sketch of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, or Chou En-Lai.

I have hidden the Bible that I was told the cadres planted on my desk. If I read it or share it, I am afraid I will disappear into the countryside. A German man who rushed alongside me in the building after I arrived said so. He asked nervously if they'd given me a Bible and whispered that it was a trap. Even foreigners can disappear, he said, even in 1988; his friend has been taken away and not heard from. Do not reveal to them that he really is a priest, he begged. Just in case, I have put the Bible on top of my tall boxy dresser where they know I will not often reach.

The plaster walls of my room are gouged and scarred. Could this be a tiny microphone? Have they buried cameras the way they do in the foreigner hotels? Can they see me lock this journal in my suitcase? Do they watch me staring out the window; reading, reading my two letters; singing to myself?

I am sitting on the edge of my small bed. I have wrapped my head in a silk scarf of mesh, fine enough to filter this perpetual dust from the Gobi Desert. The scarf is green and woven with gold threads. I learned to wrap myself by looking from my window at women passersby bent into wind. My scarf envelops my entire head and is tied around my throat.

Breathe slowly, steadily. Don't cough. Stare through my little emerald window. Stare through feathery dust devils and cracked glass. Stare through waves of dust from the north and at the row of gray, shadowy, concrete apartment blocks—heavy, stranded whales. Stare until they levitate and swim away.

Deborah Golub's writing has appeared in *Salmagundi*, the *Massachusetts Review*, *Transcultural Psychiatry*. and other journals.

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I am forgotten. Far. Forever. No! How dare! Spit. Bite. Speck. Float. Slow. Lost. Shhh. Hush little baby. Heartbeat, me. Fingernail, me. Pen. Scratch. Wait. Outwit. Shhh.

The scent of oranges and summer sun washes through the Spanish village where I have flown. I see myself seeing myself in the mirror of my flamenco dance studio, practicing: castanets, fan, skirt, back, feet, arms, face. My teacher is lean and wears black. The front of his body almost touches the front of mine. He stares in my eyes, his face as close as a lover's. He is testing my concentration: that my gaze at him not include him, although he teases me with his body, curved toward me like a question mark.

They are keeping me in this room incommunicado. That is why you have not heard from me, Mother. Listen! Listen! If I concentrate well, you will hear me.

"Welcome, English professor!" And when I responded, "Psychology," they became silent. The chief cadre smiled: "You have no need for money because you will have no place to spend it. You will not leave this building. You will not leave this room except to eat. You will learn patience." The smile did not leave her face, nor did any place on her body flicker.

Keep your sadness and hatred hidden in your chest, a woman has advised me surreptitiously. I must learn to decapitate the head from my body. "I hate you!" I think as I praise the cadre, smiling greatly for her: "Yes, you are wise; I must learn patience." My tears are a heavy pool in my heart.

Something in this room will be my friend. Yes, the emerald dragon whose shape someone stitched beneath a corner of my blanket.

I hear the woman deliver my daily thermos of boiled water, cup, and loose tea. She does not knock; she is not to have contact with me. I long to see her face, my only visitor, but whenever I rush to the door, she is gone. All that is left of her is a crooked trail of water-drip up the green stairs. I imagine that she is old, she walks so slowly from the water shed up the steps, clanking her pails and thermoses. The twisting trail she leaves behind belongs to an ancient, tired dragon.

I place the tea in the cup. I pour hot water over the twigs and leaves. I cover the cup with its lid. I wait. Floating leaves and stems saturate and sink, one by one, each in its own time. Only when every speck has settled will the tea be ready. This is what the tea teaches me: That nothing I do can hurry the right moment of each thing in this world. And after my friend has taught me to wait, it gives itself to me again, a warm liquid deep in my chest.

Hours become days. I have grown old. It is not disappearance; I simply do not exist.

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WITHOUT SCIENCE, RELIGION REVERTS TO SUPERSTITION

So taught the Hellenistic philosophy of Epicurus. He believed that truly useful religion—contributing peace of mind—comes by imagining deity as tranquil and not meddlesome in human affairs. Such deity cannot be imagined, however, unless one knows the limits of what is possible and what impossible, which can be learned only through the empirical study of nature.

Of all ancient philosophies Epicureanism is most comparable to modern physics and biology; for it, reality is that the essence of matter is atomic, and of living things, indeterministic and evolutionary—no Creator, no Providence in its worldview. Idealists (Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, Judaists)—who regard matter and life as initiated and governed by divine Intelligence—scorned such impious doctrine; scorned, too, Epicureans' ascribing laws and virtues to human rather than divine will. Epicureans said that primitive men initiated ethics when neighbors made compacts not to harm one another in person or property. This led to the precept that deceit must be avoided. Idealists held no such scruples; deception in the form of myth, poetry, and rhetoric served them as means to inculcate loyalty to deity, family, ruler, and to glorify pain as an aspect of such loyalty. Epicureans taught that by nature man avoids pain and seeks pleasure. Hence, idealists despised Epicureans as pleasuremongers and as threats to social order. Rabbis used "Epicurus!" as a curse word. Justin Martyr, an idealistic philosopher who became a Christian, thought that God used Plato, Stoics, poets, and historians—whatever they rightly said belonged to Christians too. But he excluded and condemned Epicureans.

Since Christianity was a blend of idealisms, one would think its founder, Jesus, rejected Epicureanism. Not so. According to Jack Hannah the biggest error perpetrated by well-intentioned, idealistically minded persons is the depiction of Jesus as an idealist. Ironically, it was an Epicurean spirit of critical scrutiny, reborn in the Enlightenment, that exposed the use of myth and rhetoric by the Evangelists in fabricating narratives about Jesus—their deceits so pervasive that attempts by various scholars to extract the historical Jesus from their Gospels yield Jesus as peasant revolutionary, Essene messianist, charlatan magician, Jewish Cynic . . . yet always as idealist, which Hannah says is historically questionable. Historicity can never be approached using the four Gospels of the New Testament as principal source.

Hannah has detected that a recently unearthed collection of 113 sayings of Jesus (the so called *Gospel of Thomas*) is a record that escaped alteration by writers under the influence of the four canonical Gospels; its sayings show them prior to rather than dependent on comparable canonical sayings. Their sequence corresponds chronologically to the *Gospel of Mark*'s course of events. This corroborates the claim made in the incipit to the *Gospel of Thomas* that its contents are remarks that puzzled Thomas, one of Jesus' students, who wrote them down. As student notes, taken at the time heard, of sayings not well understood, to be studied when there was leisure, the *Gospel of Thomas* affords verbatim data that are likely not contaminated by somebody's point of view. And since these notes are chronologically ordered, Hannah couples each with its associated context from Mark to construct a narrative. Given a context, the 113 sayings become more reliably interpretable. This narrative indicates that Jesus was oriented to Epicureanism and was not a believer in Judaism's teachings regarding God, messiahship, prophets, demons, circumcision, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and food regimen. Probably his speaking in enigmatic "sound bites" hid from his disciples his favoring a philosophy that their Jewish religion despised. So what did Jesus think he could accomplish surreptitiously?

Just like Epicureans, Jesus was sensitive to the pain of his fellow man. Just as Epicureans did, Jesus administered maxims as verbal medicine for preventing or healing distress of mind caused by superstitious ideas about gods and death. When his disciples were anxious as to how they should observe certain everyday religious duties, he answered with the saying: "Do not speak a lie, and do not do what you hate." Another of his sayings: "You will not taste death," corresponds to the Epicurean: "Nothing expected in death," which is one of four principal "verbal medicines" that was administered to protect mental health. The difference in the way it is phrased suggests that, though Jesus mainly addressed Jews, he as well corrected Epicurean belief that death means annihilation. Hannah presents a case for Jesus' having transformed the Epicurean explanation of how immortal divine entities come to exist into an explanation of how an immortal entity that continues one's personal consciousness can emerge from material bodies.

You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism by Jack Hannah
ISBN 0-9670053-0-2. 321 pages, paperback, $12 postpaid. Order with check from
FRANK PUBLISHING, 1816 Springmill Road, Mansfield, OH 44903-8907

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• B O O K S •

REREADING

Lawrence by Lightning

PICO IYER

Growing up within the tightly guarded confines of a fifteenth-century English boarding school, my friends and I took as our tokens of accomplishment the somewhat recherché gray volumes known as Penguin Modern Classics. When I was in college, in the midseventies, Picador books would become the rage (Hunter Thompson, Tom Wolfe, Richard Brautigan—outlaw American energy packaged as real literature!); and, a decade later, in the sleek Manhattan of the eighties, the Vintage Contemporaries series (born, it seemed, out of *Bright Lights, Big City*) would have a special cachet as some of us hobbled off to Area at 3:00 A.M. But in 1972, in rural, changeless England, where our allowances were scarcely large enough to stretch to three packages of McVitie's digestives every six months, and where we had to attend chapel twice a day, Latin hymns on Sunday nights, and class at 7:30 A.M.—all in white tie and tails—we could think of no better way to distinguish ourselves than through amassing these formidable gray paperbacks on our shelves.

Canetti, Čapek, Svevo, Vian: even now the names, nearly all foreign and unpronounceable, reek of forbidden cigarettes and the cafés we weren't allowed to visit. To this day I remember next to nothing of any of these books, and even the authors' names are increasingly strange to me. But in anxious adolescence, they were the last word, so it seemed, in worldliness and sophistication, to be displayed beside our beds like the conquests (in this all-male internment camp) we hadn't made. The funeral-black Penguin Classics—Xenophon and Sir Thomas More and Plutarch—were too much like everything we were trying to escape; the jaunty contemporary orange Penguins—Laurie Lee and Keith Waterhouse and Kingsley Amis—seemed too much a part of the dreary English landscape all around; but the Penguin Modern Classics—*The Magic Mountain, The Counterfeiters, Nausea*—were everything we sought (and found most efficiently, as it happened, in the cinema, among Pasolini renditions of Boccaccio and Chaucer)—namely, grown-up European works of high culture that packed the punch of illicit magazines.

Occasionally, almost flukily, a volume would surface that had so much to do with adolescent boys escaping from their military surroundings (and brandishing, as status symbols, philosophical tomes) that we would actually read it in its entirety and with a palpitating, almost awestruck sense of recognition. Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* was one such work, inevitably, with its haunting evocation of a paradise glimpsed in boyhood and never found again; Raymond Radiguet's *Le Diable au Corps* (or *The Devil in the Flesh*, as it was translated for us) was another, a highly French tale of an eighteen-year-old boy taking on an older mistress, which convinced us all we were actually Frenchmen under the skin. A fifteen-year-old housemate (now, of course, one of En-

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gland's most distinguished moral voices) once slipped me a copy of Hesse's *Narziss and Goldmund* with the blunt Anglo-Saxon commendation, "It's got a hundred screws."

I read it immediately, and almost instantly felt at home in it: not only because of its austere gray cover, depicting a chestnut tree outside a wintry monastery that looked uncannily similar to the monastery-in-mufti where we were working on our chastity, poverty, and obedience; and not only because of its earnest, almost sacramental hallowing of a friendship between two young men, one immersed in the world of books, the other committed to finding the meaning of life through a series of adventures (in short, as my friend had promised, an archetypal Hellenic quest with R-rated props); but also, I suppose, because—like all our favorite books—it was about a seeker pledged to the holiness of the heart's affections and committed to individuality at any cost. (Much later, I would see that part of its appeal might even have had to do with the fact that it was the only common link between my surplice-choired medieval school and the vagrant hippie California of my parents' home, to which I returned on holidays—and, of course, it took that very commute, the dialogue between Apollo and Dionysus, as its theme).

But before I could fall completely under Hesse's spell, another book came along that touched a sudden flame in me in some more mysterious way. D. H. Lawrence's novella *The Virgin and the Gypsy* (written not long before his death, in France, in 1930, and found only after it) was an orange Penguin of the kind we affected to despise, and came from someone as much of the countryside around us as the Huxleys and Orwells we were force-fed in class (and the poems that rhymed with the memorial plaques that surrounded us—"*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*"). Yet it had to it something foreign and subversive that seemed to place it among the gray books we regarded as canonical. Part of its attraction came no doubt from the photograph it bore on its cover—of the Canadian actress Joanna Shimkus, as ethereal and undefiled as a Botticelli angel, looking into the distance as she is approached by a movie Minotaur (Franco Nero, then at the height of his fame). Part of it no doubt came from its bringing together of young English girl and alien wanderer—as if Narziss and Goldmund were of different sexes, and could interact in newly electric ways! But whatever the source of its magic, as familiar and unfathomed as a loved one, I opened the book on the afternoon of my fifteenth birthday, and closed it that evening, feeling that a chapter in my boyhood now had ended.

Later, of course, I would find any number of clearer reasons for the way in which it possessed me. Virgins and gypsies were the two kinds of beings most outside our orbit then, and most subject to our fascination; and Lawrence's heroic energy, his unvarnished romanticism, his relentless, burning determination to tell a story about a young and inexperienced soul awakening to its destiny (its passion) were guaranteed to appeal to overeducated inmates like ourselves. The book was everything that was denied us (girls and movement and rebellion). It was escape—from the dark and draughty classrooms on whose desks 530 years of predecessors had scribbled their names; from the unreal rites of reciting the principal parts of the Greek verb βαίνω ("I walk") in our pajamas and then donning black robes to go to class at dawn; from, in fact, all the cultural weight and sense of expectation embodied by those Penguin Modern Classics.

But it was something more than that, too. At college a few years later (where beginning students of literature were allowed to read "modern" authors for their first year only—"modern" meaning later than 1832, though earlier than 1945), Lawrence was far and away the most explosive novelist on offer—and, we soon found, the only male novelist, other than Henry James, that girls seemed to like too. And there was something about his raw, passionate intensity, scrupulously unrevised and incorrigibly restless, that felt (as Emily Brontë did) like the way we might write in our diaries, if we admitted to them. Not forbidding like Joyce, not rich with metropolitan polish like Woolf, Lawrence came across as less a text than a man, shouting in our ears.

When finally I succeeded in falling in love (in a kind of *Virgin and Gypsy* episode with the characters reversed), I found myself reading the final sentences of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* aloud to my new companion (the book's origi-

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nal title, *Tenderness*, catching all the luminous sweetness and almost elegiac vulnerability of Lawrence in his final years, his strident dogmatism giving way to something more human and gentle, delivered in a spirit of farewell). I made my way back to his story "Love Among the Haystacks," and was so moved by its air of protective intimacy that I paid it homage in the only way I could—by concocting a similar romance, set in the university library, which I called "Love Among the A Stacks." In the same volume, I came upon Lawrence's last story, "The Man Who Died," and was so stunned by its tale of the risen Jesus, aching with incompleteness, and the priestess of Isis who ministers to his wounds, that I wheedled the Oxford University Arts Society into giving me a grant to turn it into a film.

But as the years passed, and my initial excitement in discovering freedom and love subsided a little, Lawrence fell away from me a little, too. Studying English and more English, as if longing to profess it (from the age of seventeen to the age of twenty-five—it seems insane to me now—I studied nothing but English literature, with even American literature generally regarded as beyond the pale), I turned to Lawrence whenever I wanted a jolt of electricity, something visionary and intoxicating to raise me above the day-to-day world—and, better yet, to a world whose contours were lined with gold. And whenever I traveled, I read what Lawrence had written about the place I was visiting, since he caught everywhere he saw with a quick impatience that put traditional "travel writers" to shame. When I went to Australia in 1988, the only guidebook of any use was *Kangaroo*, written sixty years earlier after a stay of only a few weeks; in the California where I had lived for thirty years, I never found the description to better Lawrence's dashed-off assessment in a letter:

> A queer place—in a way, it has turned its back on the world, and looks into the void Pacific. It is absolutely selfish, very empty, but not false, and at least not full of false effort. . . . It's a sort of crazy sensible. Just the moment: hardly as far ahead as *carpe diem*.

I even drove across country more than once, sleeping in my car, to visit the small hut above Taos where Lawrence had lived among the pines.

Yet the feeling always lingered, especially as I learned to read with a "critical" eye, that Lawrence was one of those enthusiasms of youth that one put away with childish things, like Hesse, in fact (or their radiant disciple, Henry Miller). He was never very far away from me—the pale, blazing figure in the corner whose eyes won't leave you alone—but he was so much himself, I felt, at every moment and in every sentence, that he could not easily be fit into someone else's life. (This must have been the problem for those who met him, too, and found themselves stranded between impatience and love.) Lawrence existed so far outside the usual categories—it was hard to assign him a race, a class, even at times a gender—that he could not be assimilated into any system. He had something in common with all the great English writers who railed against English narrowness and skepticism (Graham Greene and Somerset Maugham, John Berger and John le Carré), but he remained redoubtably an odd man out. And where the other unassimilable mavericks, like Melville or Thoreau, were apostles of aloneness, Lawrence insisted on bringing his ungovernable singularity to the theme of human connectedness, the sparks of divinity that fly between one soul and another.

Then, a few months ago, Lawrence unexpectedly gate-crashed my life again. An Englishman from Hollywood came to see me, interested in adapting a romance I'd written many years before, and as his calling card and letter of reference he gave me a script he'd just written, based on an early Lawrence novel. The best reader I know suddenly got in touch to tell me to read Geoff Dyer's *Out of Sheer Rage*, a portrait of Lawrence so Lawrentian that it never actually addresses its subject or gets round to discussing most of his books (being content, instead, to loose a Lawrentian fury against the very notion of biography and, of course, against the unchanging stiffness and conventionalism of England). The passages from Lawrence's letters that Dyer included in his meanderings shone like sparklers held up on a chill November evening, at

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a Guy Fawkes party in the Midlands, by a stranger who stands so close to you that you can see his breath condense in the dark.

That same month, an old friend from northern California called me up to ask whether I'd be interested in helping him work up a film based on "The Man Who Died" (the same project I'd hatched twenty years before)—though before I could answer he got caught in a tragicomic whirl over the screen rights that ended, a few months later, with the discovery that they belonged to a mysterious Italian fugitive whose ex-partners said, "He is either in America—or Hell!"

It was time, clearly, to put aside all these imperfect reflections of Lawrence and read the man himself again. I was now almost exactly the same age he had been when he embarked upon his great final period (lit up, as Keats's last months were, by a flicker of almost posthumous radiance that sometimes seems to accompany the final stages of tuberculosis). More than that, I'd reached the point in life in which I was not so often discovering new writers as constantly rediscovering old ones, going back again and again to *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Of Human Bondage,* and to the letters of Keats in which he says that a "World of Pains" is necessary to "school an Intelligence and make it a soul." Besides, I was now a world away from England and adolescence, living in a small apartment in the Japanese countryside where not freedom but seclusion seemed the greatest luxury.

One dark December afternoon, while the sweet-potato salesman outside played his unbearably melancholy traditional song and a child across the way picked out a simple melody on his piano, I picked up a copy of the tale that had so consumed me once, and returned to the damp English north. Almost instantly, of course, I found that nothing was as I remembered it: the virgin and the gypsy scarcely meet in all the brief eighty-five pages—everything is intimation and fleeting glances—and their bond is not even explicitly consummated. The teenage boy in search of forbidden excitements could only have been partially delighted by "The absolutely naked insinuation of desire made her lie prone and powerless in the bed as if a drug had cast her in a new, molten mould."

I could see now, in fact, that the story had as much to do with class as with sex, and really was nothing more than a cry for release from the stifling puritanism and hypocrisies of English provincial life (a life I'd never known). Two young girls—Yvette, the virgin of the title, and her sister, Lucille—return from a "finishing year" in Lausanne, all fur collars and chic hats, to the ugly stone house of their father's rectory, where he, one Arthur Saywell, sits like a frightened frog, wrestling for power with his mother, his sister, and a brother in "an atmosphere of cunning self-sanctification." The girls' glamorous mother, "She-who-was-Cynthia," who stands for everything quick and flowing in them, is never mentioned (she having long since run away from this Horlicks Hell); and every time one of the young women opens a window in search of "fresh air," Granny slams it shut, complaining of the "draughts."

As all that suggests, *The Virgin and the Gypsy* is written with the kind of naked self-forgetfulness that Lawrence made his own. There is little subtlety or surprise in it, and you know, really, as soon as you see the title (even without Joanna Shimkus on the cover), what will happen, and what it all means. Uncle Fred is a "stingy and grey-faced man of forty, who just lived dingily for himself"; Aunt Cissie is "pale, pious and gnawed by an inward worm"; even the back-cover blurb talks routinely of "the stifling confines of home and family" and the "elemental force" that "threatens the conventional fabric of Yvette's existence." And that force is embodied, far too conveniently, by a married itinerant laborer "with full, conceited, impudent black eyes," whom Yvette meets when her family car almost collides with his gypsy cart.

Yet what is more startling, perhaps, especially to one long past adolescence, is how this most familiar and predictable of stories—scarcely more than a Harlequin romance, it seems, of a pale girl rescued by a dark manly creature of the wild—is made something more, simply through the intensity and conviction Lawrence pours into it. On a sentence-by-sentence level, it is almost irredeemably sloppy and banal ("Feelings are so complicated" is about as subtle as the synopsis of Yvette's feelings gets); yet burning through the sentences,

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and flickering at their corners, is a fire that cannot be easily ignored.

You read Lawrence, I came to see, almost entirely by flashes of lightning. Whole stretches are flat and quite unremarkable; it's almost better not to take in the descriptions of "the mysterious fruit of her virginity" or "the rather resentful brown eyes of a spoilt Jewess"; the virtually unintelligible digression about how the "widow of a knighted doctor, a harmless person indeed, had become an obnoxity in their lives" (a what?); or Yvette's recognition that the gypsy looked at her as if "he really, but *really, desired* me." And yet, almost by the same token, the whole thing shines, often, with a white-hot intensity that (as in Emily Brontë again) has the power to pick you up and transport you like the wind rattling against the windowpanes. I found myself reading the story as quickly as Lawrence had no doubt written it, and so reading it (as, again, I'm sure it was written) not so much with the conscious mind as with the senses and the instincts.

In a certain respect, in fact, Lawrence's prose enacts the very liberation it describes, speaking to one as the gypsy does, and touching something unprotected and soft, something virginal, that makes one feel as if cynicism is a distant country. There are no half-measures here (every sentence is thrown down like a dare, even as it contradicts one in the previous paragraph), and Lawrence writes as if under the possession of a spirit that does not allow him to linger over details or niceties.

It is this, perhaps, that helps him get us to care for Yvette as wholly and solicitously as he clearly does. She is an archetypal heroine from his later period—all tenderness and longing, a moist snowflower waiting for her spring. But she is also a typical nineteen-year-old—flighty, proud, selfish, and spoilt (her "soft, virgin, heedless candor," as he writes, is responsible for "her admirers and her enemies"). Yvette, he tells us, with a saving detachment, "was born inside the pale. And she loved comfort, and a certain prestige." Even her wish to "fall *violently* in love" is, in a certain light, absurd (she "seemed always to imagine," he writes, "that someone would come along singing *Tirra-lirra!* or something equally intelligent, by the river").

Yet in the midst of all this, there is something else in her, something indefinable—a flame, or candle, inside her being—that Lawrence tends to zealously. To a remarkable extent, he sits inside her being—one reason why one of the great androgynous writers has always appealed to women as much as to men—and cheers her spirit on. "There is something about me which they don't see and never would see," she thinks at one point, and Lawrence acts as the custodian of that hidden angel, bringing it forth with all the understanding of a spirit no less intuitive and rebellious and turned toward heaven.

Of course, I thought, in my elder self, an adolescent boy in a boarding school would thrill to this tale of a spirit inside him that no one but he can recognize (the theme of Hesse, again, and of all our favorite questers). And Lawrence, writing with a furious, headlong, hit-or-miss abandon, catches some of these sensations as one would a flame. (I recalled that part of his force came from the fact that he revised not by tinkering with words or polishing cadences but by writing the whole manuscript—all five hundred pages of it, if need be—out from scratch again, so as to catch that heedless momentum.) But I also saw that a teenage boy would have been stirred less by the heroine's "bare upper arms"—or by the fact that she, like him, is longing for real experience (with, as Lawrence insists, someone other than a boarding-school boy)—than by lines like "On her face was that tender look of sleep, which a nodding flower has when it is full out."

At the climax of the brief story, both these strands—the absolute looseness of the brute judgments and repetitions, and the light shining within and in spite of them—come together dramatically. Suddenly, after a flash flood in a nearby river, the waters rise outside the rectory and begin to pour into the garden, where Yvette is sitting on a nostalgic spring afternoon (the former graduate student in me rolling his eyes at the heavy-handedness of the symbolism). "She was barely conscious: as if the flood was in her soul," Lawrence writes, in defiance of every ascetic precept taught in literature classes. At that very moment, of course, the gypsy shows up, pulls her up to safety, and, while hated Granny dies, is obliged to strip off his clothes and take the naked

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Yvette into his arms to protect her from the rising wind and waters.

Yet just as everything seems to be dwindling into caricature, Lawrence defers, as few writers do, to mystery. The dark animal wanderer holds the virgin princess in his arms—the moment we've been waiting for all along—and that is all he seems to do. At precisely the instant when we most expect Lawrence to fulminate, he rises into silence (as he does earlier in the story when Yvette visits a fortune-teller and, miraculously, follows her into a caravan so we never learn what passes between them). There is a numinousness at the heart of the tale (and of his conception of the link between his characters) that Lawrence has the sense not to mess with, and as the story drifts into the fragile, intimate moments of his later period, its mysterious beauty is of the same kind you feel when the priestess washes Jesus' wounds in "The Man Who Died," or the woman who gets on a horse in New Mexico simply rides away into the mountains. Geoffrey meets the sodden Lydia in the haystacks and just shelters her all night, in a communion more moving than any love scene I can think of; the gypsy sends Yvette a letter on the final page—*Lady Chatterley* again—and we learn for the first time that he has a name.

I thought back, closing the book in my modern Japanese apartment, to the fifteen-year-old in his little cell, devouring the whole story in an afternoon, and I saw that something more valuable than his prurience, or even his nascent sense of romanticism, was being encouraged. Escape was less the point than a kind of tenderness that could flicker into something higher. And I thought even more of the fledgling student of literature embarking on a ten-year course of learning to read books by breaking them down into pieces. Like almost no other writer I can think of, with the exception of Melville or the Shakespeare of Poor Tom (or such idiosyncratic forces as Arundhati Roy or Keri Hulme), Lawrence refuses to let you read him in that way: either you surrender to him, and to a spirit that flings out every sentence as if it were its last, or you are condemned to remain forever on the sidelines.

As someone trying to be a writer now myself, and thus more concerned than ever with carefulness and craft, with all the prohibitions that watchfulness creates, I think I heard Lawrence even more powerfully than I had twenty-five years before, enjoining me to read and listen with the soul (as he does, preeminently, in his *Studies of Classic American Literature*), and taking me precisely to those areas where words are of no use. Lawrence approaches the world, his characters, and even the reader as if he were their lover (and an impatient, restless lover at that), and taking him on his own terms, as one has to do, I hardly had the consciousness to notice that the story—now in its twenty-eighth printing—comes these days with a cover image of a young woman staring into a fire bright as lightning (the movie version having long since been forgotten). Its elegant gray spine proclaims it to be now, as it had not been in 1972, a Penguin Modern Classic.

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A Critic's Charmed Life

EVELYN TOYNTON

NO OTHER BOOK: SELECTED ESSAYS
By Randall Jarrell. Edited and with an introduction by Brad Leithauser.
HarperCollins. $27.50.

REMEMBERING RANDALL:
A MEMOIR OF POET, CRITIC, AND TEACHER RANDALL JARRELL
By Mary von Schrader Jarrell. HarperCollins. $22.

"The critic, described in ideal perfection . . ." But of course nobody talks about critics like that: the real subject of that phrase from the *Biographia Literaria* is "the poet." T. S. Eliot said the critic must be "very intelligent"; I. A. Richards believed that "the ideal critic is simply the ideal reader" (a sentiment expressed in nearly identical terms by Randall Jarrell). What rarely gets mentioned, in talking about the attributes of critics, is the role of personality—that vivid sense we get, when reading the best of them, that this is a flavor we have not met with before; we could not possibly be hearing this from anyone else.

Think of Dr. Johnson; think of Coleridge; think of Orwell. Their critical opinions seem so much the expression of their distinctive temperaments that there is no way to separate the two: to read them is to be reminded of just what a personal activity thinking really is. More than the poet, more than the novelist, who can at least partially disappear behind characters, metaphors, artifice, the critic comes before us naked; he (or she) is the only character on the page, and had better be an engaging one.

All of which may explain why we can still read Randall Jarrell's criticism with pleasure thirty-four years after his death, when—as Brad Leithauser points out in his introduction to *No Other Book*, his selection of Jarrell's essays—we are unlikely to get much joy from reading John Crowe Ransom, say, or even (it must sheepishly be admitted) Eliot.

Of course Jarrell was also "very intelligent"—a poet himself, he was "cursed," as yet another critic said of him, "with infallible taste." His judgments of the poets of his day, startling at the time, are now our orthodoxy; he was the first to insist on Frost's greatness, for example, and changed Frost's reputation forever—or if not forever, at least until now—with one fiercely impassioned essay. He insisted on Whitman's greatness, too, at a time when most intellectuals regarded Whitman as "the Thomas Wolfe of nineteenth-century democracy, the hero of a DeMille movie about Walt Whitman." No one has illuminated for us more powerfully what it is that distinguishes a given poet from all others, that makes Wallace Stevens "necessary" and also makes Marianne Moore necessary, but in a wholly different way. At the same time, he was generous in his appreciation of more marginal figures, such as Robert Graves. Even while analyzing, with potentially devastating precision, the qualities in Graves's work that relegated him permanently to the status of minor poet, Jarrell could wholeheartedly praise him for the "marvelous and troubling . . . monster" he was.

And if he was prescient about which poets would last, he was also prescient about the mass culture that was rendering people incapable of responding to art: its "mixture of rhetoric and reality, in which people are given what they want to be given in the form in

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which they know they want to be given it, is something more efficient and more irresistible than any real art." He wrote in the 1950s about the public's hunger for newness, excitement, intimate details of the lives of celebrities; he wrote about the disappearance of a sense of the past and of any common culture or knowledge besides the kind "that five or ten years from now [people] will not even remember having known." Very intelligent indeed.

But it is his singular voice—a mix of razzmatazz and exaltation, lyricism and ire and wit—that makes us want to go on reading and rereading Jarrell's essays forty and fifty years after they were first published. He was a great celebrator, of the world as well as of poets, and a great lamenter too; he was a moralist in both his celebrations and his laments, full of impassioned pleas for us to take the blinders off, to pay more attention, to read better:

> What would an ideal public do? Mainly, essentially, it would just read the poet; read him with a certain willingness and interest; read him imaginatively and perceptively. . . . It needs him, even if it doesn't know that; he needs it, even if he doesn't know that. . . . The writer writes what he writes just as the public likes what it likes; he can't help himself, it can't help itself, but each of them has to try: most of our morality, most of our culture are in the trying.

Like his nineteenth-century predecessors, this exponent and explicator of modernism, lover of sports cars and Johnny Unitas, assumed, absolutely, the relationship of art to morality. Even the question of how to read Kipling without preconceptions, or of the abstract expressionists' relation to the physical world, had moral ramifications for him. That was why what he called "the Medium," whose "sure-fire stereotypes [are] what any true art, true spirit, has had to struggle past on its way to the truth," frightened him so much, and why he could write about it with such near-tragic urgency.

Yet Jarrell continued to believe—he *had* to believe—in the endurance of art:

> when . . . neither the poems, the poet, nor the public exist any longer—and this possibility can no longer seem to us as strange as it would once have seemed—there is surely some order of the world, some level of being, at which they still subsist: an order in which the lost plays of Aeschylus are not different from those that have been preserved, an order in which the past, the present and the future have in some sense the same reality. Or so—whether we think it or not—we all feel.

These are the weapons of romanticism, Wordsworth's neo-Platonism marshaled against the encroachment of despair. Jarrell may have been the first to understand that Wallace Stevens was an American descendant of the Romantics, but whether he knew it about himself is not clear, and perhaps it does not matter much. As a poet—which is how he always thought of himself, even during long periods when the poems didn't come—he sometimes seemed to be "fluttering in that swampy ground where [he] was hatched, thinking of [his] wings and never flying." As a critic, he soared.

In fact, if his criticism has a flaw, it is that he sometimes seems to be working himself up deliberately to the required pitch of rapture; at his most manic, he tries to bully the reader into joining him there. Even the famous essays on Frost and Whitman, for all their brilliance, suffer a little from Jarrell's continuous, repetitive insistence on just *how* wonderful these wonderful poems are. We are exhorted to strenuous admiration not once but a dozen times in as many pages: "anyone who knows these poems well will consider the mere mention of them enough to justify any praise, any extravagance"; "this poem makes Pascal's 'eternal silence of those infinite spaces' seem the hush between the movements of a cantata"; "the last two lines make tears of delight come into one's eyes"; and so on.

He could also, however, be exuberantly nasty. Leithauser has included twenty-five pages of excerpts from essays not printed here in their entirety, and much of his "Jarrell Gallery" consists of the witty put-downs for which Jarrell was notorious in his lifetime. Oscar Williams's poems "gave the impression of having been written on a typewriter by a typewriter"; e. e. cummings "has hidden his talent under a flower, and there it has gone on reproducing, by parthenogenesis, poem after poem after poem"; the poetry of Josephine Miles is

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likened to "the diary some impressionable but unimpassioned monomaniac had year by year been engraving on the side of a knitting needle." But for those hopelessly bad poets whose "thin pamphlets . . . come in day after day, like the cries and truck sounds from the street," Jarrell felt a certain tenderness:

> People's hard lives and hopeless ambitions have expressed themselves more directly and heartbreakingly than they have ever been expressed in any work of art: it is as if the writers had sent you their ripped-out arms and legs, with "This is a poem" scrawled on them in lipstick.

(A good poet, on the other hand, is "someone who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times; a dozen or two dozen times and he is great. . . ." The problem with Jarrell is that one can go on quoting him forever; to quote him on quoting, "These are just some of the things I can't bear not to quote, I haven't yet come to the things I want to quote—I may never get to them.")

Some of his appeal, of course—one reason that *No Other Book* has been written up so glowingly in the *New York Times Book Review, The New Yorker,* and elsewhere—is undoubtedly nostalgia, the feeling that we shall not look upon his like again. However much Jarrell mourned the developments that threatened art and artists, and the "Obscurity of the Poet" (the title of one of his best-known essays), his roots were in the pre-"Medium" age; his whole sensibility and critical ethos were formed there. The very indignation with which he protests the underrating of certain poets suggests that to be rated highly as a poet was a serious and central fact of life; that the stakes were still high enough to warrant the expenditure of wrath. Now that these stakes are so low as to seem nonexistent (no one even pretends otherwise; no one can suspend disbelief, or summon up any but the most dispirited protest, for even as long as it takes to write a review), Jarrell seems almost like an innocent to us.

And then he writes neither like our academics nor like our journalists. He has no system, no critical method (which he thought an *"Encyclopedia of Pseudo-Sciences"* might define as "the systematic application of foreign substances to literature; any series of devices by which critics may treat different works of art as much alike as possible"), no professional vocabulary or apparatus. His prose, though full of slang and wisecracks, lacks the slickness of even our most highbrow journalism; there is too much explication in it, too many allusions; it calls for too much active thinking on the part of the reader, rather than wrapping ideas in one neat formulation after another. At the same time, Jarrell doesn't sound like the writers in a latter-day literary journal, either. Despondent though he was about the state of American culture and the artist's alienation from it, his voice conveys the implicit conviction that what he says still matters terribly, that somebody out there is taking notice.

In fact, one could almost say that he led a charmed life, despite the periods when poetry deserted him—and during those times he translated *Faust,* served as the Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress (what is now called the Poet Laureate), wrote a witty satirical novel and some beautiful children's books, and composed most of the criticism for which he is remembered. Certainly, the impression left by *Remembering Randall,* a memoir by his widow, Mary von Schrader Jarrell, is one of a life full of great and small pleasures: not only poetry but symphonies, opera, ballet, the engravings of Dürer, the Brueghels in the Kunsthistorische Museum in Vienna; friendships with fellow writers such as Robert Lowell and Peter Taylor and Hannah Arendt; tennis and fast cars and *Road & Track* magazine; the domestic joys of jam making and bird-watching and shopping for clothes with his wife.

When depression hit, toward the end of his life (he died in 1965, at the age of fifty-one), it was, ironically enough, brought to a head by a bad review: his last book of poems was savaged in the *New York Times Book Review.* Jarrell, who had been battling the onset of despair for the previous year, slit his wrist and was hospitalized. It was perhaps inevitable, then, that when he died, six months later, there were rumors of suicide—rumors that have persisted into the present. Mary Jarrell, however, points out that not only was he in much better spirits by the time he died, but also the car that killed him

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hit the side of his body—that is, he did not throw himself in front of it.

Yet perhaps her whole memoir is shadowed by that rumor of suicide. She seems, at any rate, so anxious for us to know that her husband was happy—particularly that he was happy with her—that most of what she records of his conversation is love talk: "I have a surprise, you dear, funny thing. Guess what, there's a Garbo rerun playing up in Balboa. Why don't you put on that dovey bare-shouldered paisley and we'll go out in the great world and laugh and play? Eh? Dinner, too." Every other word he speaks to her in the book is an endearment—"pet cat," "peaches," "little Peterkin," "best beloved," "baby doll," "old pet." It may be that they really talked to each other like that, but it sounds embarrassingly like a "woman's novel" of the period, full of cloying sweetness. And that's a shame, because when Mary Jarrell turns to the facts of their life together—how her relatives found their way into Jarrell's poems, how he set about translating Goethe, how they traveled together to Europe—their genuine love for each other is clearly evident.

She was his audience, his muse, his first reader; she lovingly transcribes whole poems of his into her book. She is his eulogist, as he was the eulogist of so many others. ("Eulogy was the glory of Randall's criticism," said his friend Robert Lowell.) It's just that he did it better than she can; his eulogies for the poets he loved are the best possible tribute to himself. Here is the ending of his piece on Frost:

> In these poems men are not only the glory and jest and riddle of the world, but also the habit of the world, its strange ordinariness, its ordinary strangeness, and they too trudge down the ruts along which the planets move in their courses . . . to see that a man can still include, connect and make humanly understandable or humanly ununderstandable so *much*—this is one of the freshest and oldest of joys, a joy strong enough to make us forget the limitations and excesses and baseness that these days seem unforgettable, a joy strong enough to make us say, with the Greek poet, that many things in this world are wonderful, but of all these the most wonderful is man.

A Great Writer's Everyday Workshop

WHY READ THE CLASSICS?
By Italo Calvino. Translated by Martin McLaughlin. Pantheon. $26.

Reviewed by RACHEL HADAS

Although I heard a National Public Radio commentator this very morning respectfully note that it was Derrida's sixty-ninth birthday, the prestige of poststructuralism seems, in some quarters at least, to be waning. The ugly, opaque language; the labyrinthine indirection; the prevailing mood of glumness, smugness, or indignation in so much recent literary criticism—these are beginning to lose, if not their far-reaching influence, then at least their charm. The pendulum is swinging at least partway back toward pleasure; but given the protean nature of literature and those who study it, more than one countertrend is discernible. In fact, I see at least three.

Some excellent new scholarly studies in very varied fields incorporate recent critical trends without swallowing those trends whole or kowtowing to those who originated them. James Davidson, in *Courtesans and Fishcakes,* is perfectly familiar with, but unintimidated by, Foucault's notions about sexuality in ancient Greece; Eileen Gillooly, in *Smile of Discontent,* is at home with feminist criticism and cultural studies without sacrificing clear prose, patient close readings, or even her own topic—humor.

If poststructuralist bile can be countered by humor, a related reaction is to respond to its glumness with radiant, exuberant goodwill. This trend can be seen in such recent studies of poetry as Edward Hirsch's suggestively titled *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry* (reviewed in this magazine's Spring issue) or Kenneth Koch's *Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry.* Such

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books illustrate almost too neatly the return of the repressed; if the pleasure principle in reading has been lost, here it comes back with a vengeance. Prepare for ecstasy.

Whereas books like Davidson's and Gillooly's presuppose an audience if not of specialists then at least of people already interested in ancient Greece or nineteenth-century novels by women, Hirsch and Koch address themselves to readers who know nothing and have to be persuaded that poetry is good fun. Significantly, the third manifestation of a countertrend consists of criticism that truly seems addressed to the general reader—to someone who may or may not be knowledgeable, who may or may not have already read the works the critic deals with. The bad news here is that the best critics of this kind are no longer living. The good news is that the work of at least a few such critics—to judge by the recent publication of Brad Leithauser's sprightly selection from Randall Jarrell (see page 134), and of *Why Read the Classics?*, a culling of Italo Calvino's miscellaneous criticism—is beginning to reappear. The recovery of such work from the twilight of out-of-printdom or the anarchy of cyberspace is an exemplary act of recycling, a salutary exception to the general wastefulness of an academic culture that demands ever more "cutting-edge" criticism (ouch), while blithely ignoring the riches of the recent past.

The title essay of *Why Read the Classics?* (an essay, like several others in this volume, that has previously appeared in English, in Patrick Creagh's 1987 translation of *The Literature Machine*) is a deftly self-revising and supple meditation on what a literary classic is and how it is read (note: not *how* to read it—Calvino is far too modest and urbane a guide to give orders). Through fourteen successive (re)definitions of the term *classic*, as indeed throughout this collection, Calvino avoids making exaggerated or combative claims either for the books he discusses or for classics in general. His evolving definitions of a classic are all the more suggestive for their willingness to contradict one another; for example, definition 13: "A classic is a work which relegates the noise of the present to a background hum, which at the same time the classics cannot exist without," and definition 14: "A classic is a work which persists as background noise when even a present that is totally incompatible with it holds sway." And all this without the ugly verbs *foregrounding* or *valorizing*. Calvino shrugs matter-of-factly in his acknowledgment of the pace and fragmentation of our lives (or he did in 1981, when this essay was written; how would he feel today?); he recognizes that the monastic solitude and rich library available to Giacomo Leopardi are vanished conditions. "The person who derives maximum benefit from a reading of the classics is the one who skillfully alternates classic readings with calibrated doses of contemporary material," writes Calvino. "And this does not necessarily presuppose someone with a harmonious inner calm: it could also be the result of an impatient, nervy temperament, of someone constantly irritated and dissatisfied."

Calvino is refreshingly realistic about people and books; he knows that our attention spans can be short and that books go in and out of focus. Indeed, what might be called the modern reader's attention deficit disorder when it comes to classics is one reason guides like Calvino (or Jarrell, Auden, Edmund Wilson, Kingsley Amis, and many others, most of whom are out of print) are so useful. Not only does the critic help us bring our wandering thoughts to bear on a text and then proceed to point out things we may not have noticed; he may also bring to our attention a book we've heard of but never read, or never read properly—or perhaps a book we've never even heard of. Calvino asserts in his opening essay: "We can never recommend enough first-hand reading of the text itself, avoiding as far as possible secondary bibliographies, commentaries, and other interpretations." Yet he admits at the outset that "however wide-ranging any person's formative reading may be, there will always be an enormous number of fundamental works that one has not read." Help is needed, and he provides it.

Calvino's various essays in this collection function differently, depending on what one already knows. He doesn't send me instantly back to the *Odyssey* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses;* but he does sharpen my ideas about those big, classic poems. I had read snippets of Xenophon's *Anabasis* in Greek, so Calvino's approach to it both enriches that book for me and tempts me to go back to it at some point.

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Cyrano I knew as a character in a play, not as a very funny writer; Raymond Queneau I knew as the author of a couple of antic books, not as a philosopher. The twelfth-century Muslim writer Nezami, whose bejeweled tales sound like A. S. Byatt in some of her novellas (or rather vice versa), I didn't know at all.

Calvino often has a great deal of knowledge to impart, but he is so tactful a guide that he keeps disappearing, as it were, into the book he's discussing. Ample quotation is, of course, part of the secret of such disappearances, but a more subtle one is Calvino's temperamental aversion to grandstanding. One feels that the texts he loves are more important to him than anything in particular he might have to say about them (see his definition 8: "A classic is a work which constantly generates a pulviscular cloud of critical discourse around it, but which always shakes the particles off"). This refusal to perch on a pedestal and pontificate is pleasantly evident in one of two delightful pieces on Ariosto. First Calvino describes an idea he has about *Orlando Furioso* as "a study which I would like to have carried out, and which, if I do not manage it, someone else can do in my place"; a little later, another stylistic feature of Ariosto's epic poem turns up in these terms: "another research topic I would like to investigate, but which has already been studied." Strikingly unpossessive about the texts he loves, he not only spreads his affection but, like a benign professor, sprinkles in his wake ideas for future investigations.

Occasionally in this collection, geniality and breadth come at a price. The reason Calvino's ideas about rapidity in *Candide* or satire in Dickens seem familiar isn't merely that Calvino offers them in an accessible manner; they are truly nothing new. But Calvino himself would be untroubled by this sense of familiarity. After all, if (definition 5) "a classic is a book which even when we read it for the first time gives the sense of rereading something we have read before," then why shouldn't the same be the case for commentary on the classics? The anguished desire to say something brand-new has led to such notorieties as the MLA talk on "the masturbating girl in Jane Austen"—approaches that divert the reader's attention from the text to the (clever, daring) critic. But Calvino knows that classics shake off the particles left by critics, including himself.

In addition, if a few of the pieces included here have little new to say to the Anglophone reader, that is because these essays were written for Italian readers encountering Twain or James, Conrad or Stevenson, perhaps for the first time, in the Italian publisher Einaudi's *Centopagine* series, which was Calvino's brainchild. This 1970s series may have been ahead of its time. In the United States today, children's classics are being reissued with introductions by writers like Tony Kushner, Wendy Wasserstein, and Wayne Koestenbaum, while Penguin has launched a series of brief biographies of famous figures by authors chosen for their fame and their relation to the biographee rather than for their scholarly expertise on the subject (Mary Gordon on Joan of Arc, Larry McMurtry on Crazy Horse, Edmund White on Proust, Peter Gay on Mozart, Jane Smiley on Dickens). So Calvino's recommendation of a firsthand reading of the text, minus any commentary, should be taken with a grain of salt; he had excellent ideas about which texts to present to readers, and how.

In "The Structure of the *Orlando Furioso*," a magnificent piece that was originally delivered as a radio talk, Calvino evokes what he perceives as "Ariosto's creative method . . . this expansion from within, with episodes proliferating from other episodes, generating new symmetries and contrasts . . . this poem with its polycentric, synchronic structure, whose episodes spiral off in every direction, continually intersecting with and bifurcating from each other." This description, written in 1974 (the fifth centenary of Ariosto's birth), may look in 1999 as if it anticipates hypertext, the polycentric, synchronic world of the Web. There is also more than a touch of Borges in this view of the nonlinear architecture of a book, and indeed a piece on Borges is included in *Why Read the Classics?* But the really suggestive resemblance here is between Calvino's love for a poem that he shows has no beginning and no end—that is, as it were, all in medias res—and his love for all of literature: his love and by extension anybody's. We can begin reading anywhere—with a text early in the chronology of literature (Homer, *Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*) or early in our own history *(Peter Rabbit, The Wind in the Willows, Mother Goose)*. We may get

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hooked by children's books, fantasy, science fiction, graphic novels, or poetry. We can and do loop back, rereading as often as we read (definition 1: "The classics are those books about which you usually hear people saying: 'I'm rereading . . . ,' never 'I'm reading . . .'"). Pleasure, discovery, rediscovery are of the essence; yet distraction and impatience also have their part to play in the polycentric, synchronic, episodic experience that is reading.

Like David Lodge, another novelist, critic, and Ariosto fan, Calvino is often experimental in his own narratives without ceasing to love, learn from, and refer to his predecessors. As translator Martin McLaughlin puts it, *Why Read the Classics?* "as a whole . . . offers a . . . view into the everyday workshop of a great creative writer: what Calvino read was often metamorphosed creatively, intertextually, into what Calvino wrote." Indeed, this book will send me back to Calvino's fiction. But one doesn't need to love or even know Calvino's fiction to find his criticism both charming and stimulating. It is telling, and perfectly in keeping with the low profile he maintains in these essays, that Calvino seldom refers to himself, let alone to his own work. This kind of modesty, like clear prose, has become a rarity in the inflated and obscurantist rhetoric so many critics have recently chosen (or felt obliged?) to use. Perhaps Calvino's good manners, as well as his unabashed interest in the great works of the past, are yet more harbingers of the welcome countertrend I've already mentioned. Wait, though; can the work of a man who died in 1985 be a harbinger of anything? To which the answer is: Homer and Xenophon, Ovid and Ariosto have been dead a good deal longer than Calvino, and yet, mirabile dictu, they still seem to have something to say to us. With his characteristically sly modesty, Calvino expresses the hope "that people do not believe that the classics must be read because they serve some purpose. The only reason that can be adduced in their favour is that reading the classics is always better than not reading them." Then he adds:

> And if anyone objects that they are not worth all that effort, I will cite [E. M.] Cioran . . . : "While the hemlock was being prepared, Socrates was learning a melody on the flute. 'What use will that be to you?', he was asked. 'At least I will learn this melody before I die.'"

Read It and Weep

CRYING: THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF TEARS
By Thomas Lutz. Norton. $29.95.

Reviewed by **ROBERT GRUDIN**

A few years ago I chaired an open-mike forum at a business seminar in California. The audience was large, participation was lively, and it looked as if I was going to have a pleasant job until a man stood up, grabbed the mike, and started to sob. In singsong tones, he launched into a long personal revelation. I glanced around nervously at the rest of the audience. They weren't happy campers. About half of them were staring at the weeper with prurient fascination; the others averted their eyes. Frozen at the podium, I felt conflicting emotions: the sympathetic urge to comfort the weeper; fear, that he'd go bananas or have a fit; anger, that he'd broken the genteel tone of the forum; awe, that he could so easily, so trustingly, show his vulnerability in public; annoyance, that he could do this while I had to keep myself under such strict control; fatuous pride, that my presentation had inspired such a welling-up of emotion; the morbidly spiteful impulse to let the weeper complete his seven-minute testament and then say to him, "Sorry, I missed that. Would you repeat it please?" I stifled this menagerie of feelings and forced myself to listen—luckily, because in the midst of his sobs the man was asking me a relevant question.

Several other memories of people weeping are vivid in my mind, as clear as if they'd been preserved in as many jars of tears, yet I can't remember a single instance when I myself have cried. I know that as a child I blubbered and bawled as much as the next kid, and crying is still an occasional event for me, but I can't nail down the specific memories. Why should I remember others' tears and not my own? Probably because my own tears were so

Robert Grudin's most recent book is *On Dialogue: An Essay in Free Thought.*

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effective for me. Crying was my way of expressing temporary agitation, and in convecting that energy it canceled itself. Crying was my link to the powerful channel that stretched back to infancy, in fact to nature itself. Crying, like laughing, was cathartic and hence self-annulling.

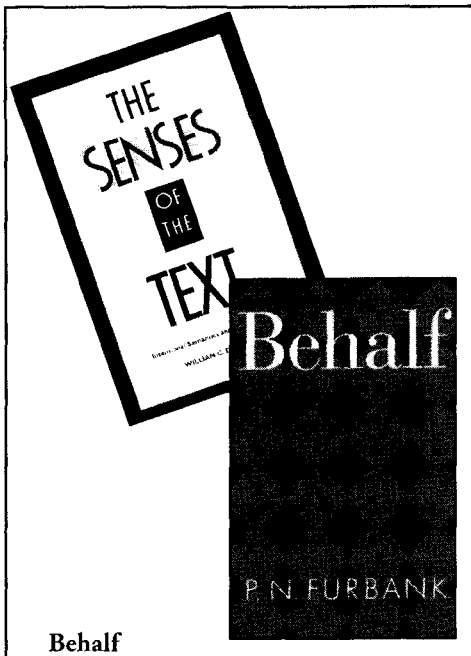
Then why should I remember so well the tears of others? Here lies the paradox of crying. While our own tears ease us mercifully, even pleasurably, the tears of others tend to upset us and to tether us in bonds of unfulfillable obligation.

This paradox and many other issues raised by tears are discussed in Thomas Lutz's *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*. Lutz, a University of Iowa English professor whose earlier credits include a book on American angst, has given us a broad-based, if sometimes thinly layered, introduction to an extensive and complex human phenomenon.

Such a project requires radically interdisciplinary research. Like Eva Brann's *What Then Is Time?* and William Ian Miller's *Anatomy of Disgust, Crying* explores wide reaches of professional territory. Lutz strays from the haven of the humanities to address physiology, psychology, sociology, and anthropology: acts of intellectual entrepreneurship to be sure, but absolutely necessitated by the wholeness of the topic. Moreover, he is able to assess these disciplines from an inclusive perspective critical of their insularity.

Lutz not only favors the reintegration of professional disciplines but also, and relatedly, the dissolution of the "mind-body distinction," which he correctly blames not on Descartes but on Plato. "The body and the brain, then, despite the history of philosophy, are inseparable—an idea that finds no argument from common sense." This sentiment is by no means new in cognitive science (see, for example, Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* of 1958) and in 1997 was given vigorous support by Candace Pert's *Molecules of Emotion*, a book that Lutz unfortunately misses.

But to do Lutz justice, he doesn't miss much else. *Crying* is a tour de force of research, a work so multifariously referential that, without today's computerized indexes and Internet resources, it would have been all but impossible to produce. It looks beyond the traditional



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learned disciplines, most often into athletics, journalism, and film. Lutz's paraphrases and analyses, moreover, are generally clear, and he has a good instinct for discovering, in a discourse or anecdote, the single compelling detail or image. Here, for example, is his only reference to the work of the anthropologist Weston LaBarre:

> Weston LaBarre told a story of going to a peyote meeting in the 1940s at which "a great burly Wichita Indian . . . suddenly burst out blubbering with an abandon which no Occidental male adult would permit himself in public. In time I learned that this was a stereotyped approach to the supernatural powers, enthusiastic weeping to indicate that he was as powerless as a child, to invoke their pity and to beseech their gift of medicinal power." LaBarre with his "burly," "blubbering" Indian bursting out inappropriately, hardly seems the relativist we expect anthropologists to be, but his work was received as new evidence of the cultural construction of the emotions. The real object of LaBarre's criticism is his audience's preconceptions about what tears mean. If tears are just culturally constructed actions, like bowing or shaking hands, then they are relative, socially acquired forms, not the unfettered outpouring of pure feeling.

This is Lutz at his best: leisurely, considered, providing an interesting anecdote that develops into an astute insight about cultural self-knowledge. At other times, though, and quite often, Lutz rushes. Take the following brief passage a few pages down from LaBarre:

> Tears mark the impossible desire to go and remain, to celebrate and mourn, to embrace the new and hold on to the old. And watching someone else cry can make us realize our own conflicted desires, our own embeddedness in and uneasiness with our place in the social world.

There is nothing the matter with these two sentences; in fact, they are among the most strikingly intelligent in the whole book. What hurts is that Lutz trots in and out of this meditative moment without developing its potential. This failure to engage recurs throughout the book. Though learned, sensible, and provocative, Lutz simply is not given to long bouts of independent thinking. One finds page after page of interesting exposition unfulfilled by thoughtful conclusions, and whole chapters that seem to end in mid-air, with little more than lead-ins to chapters that follow. Lutz is clearly more at ease as a sophisticated chronicler than as a social thinker, and so while we learn many details from this well-documented book, we gain little general enlightenment.

Other omissions, though less major, bear mention. Lutz devotes a chapter to the physiology of tears without considering the physiology of the sob, a curiously laugh-like reflex that may provide much of the catharsis of crying. He quotes Darwin (who himself wrote a book about crying) without fully considering the evolutionary function of tears: how, for example, crying might once have been a way of defusing the antagonism of an aggressor. In discussing diverse learned opinions about the function of crying, Lutz might have availed himself of the zoological concept of redundancy, which stipulates that single biological elements (for example, an organ like the mouth) can perform a variety of functions. By extension, emotions and emotional expressions like anger, sexual desire, laughter, and crying can be seen as evolving multifunctionally. In other words, Nature doesn't care how contradictory or confused a process looks to professors, as long as it works.

Finally—and this is strange in a book that seeks to unify reason with emotion—Lutz leaves himself out of the equation. We never hear of his own tears, his family's tears. He does not tell us from the gut what makes him cry, or how it feels to cry, or why he doesn't cry. This suppression, or evasion, of subjectivity robs the book of a dimension that might have unified and empowered it.

Even so, *Crying* is well worth a reader's time, valuable not only as a study of an essential human process but as a reference book on the history of the theory of human emotion. Because it is so responsibly researched and clearly put, it should hold interest not only for the general reader but for followers of the many disciplines whose purviews include human emotion.

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AMERICAN CULTURE, AMERICAN TASTES: SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE 20TH CENTURY
By Michael Kammen. Knopf. $30.

Reviewed by AMY L. BLAIR

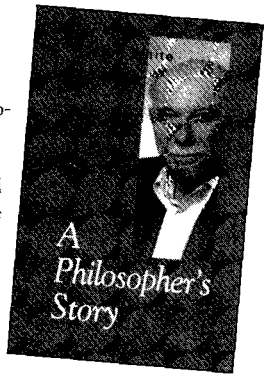
These are difficult times to be a professional culture watcher. For years, populist critics have repudiated the pessimism of Frankfurt School critics, who saw culture as deteriorating into a mire of commercial dreck. The people are not sheep, the populists argued; consumers are savvy enough to see behind the ploys of the cultural producers, and they use consumer products as they see fit, in "liberatory" ways. This was both a humanizing argument and a hip one, as it allowed academics to admit lowbrow pleasures like wrestling and shopping. But something went terribly wrong, and this notion that consumers are not dupes has been embraced by advertisers whose hip, cynical commercials remind us that "Image is Nothing," urging us to buy their products to demonstrate our individuality and rebelliousness.

So the rumblings of a paradigm shift can be detected. In *The Conquest of Cool* and *The Baffler,* Thomas Frank has called for "cult studs" to recognize the mutated corporate appropriation of the rhetoric of revolution in the service of "rebel consumerism" and to abandon the reflexive populist stance. Pierre Bourdieu, long the champion of nonjudgmental studies of taste, caused a uniquely Francophone stir with his damning treatise *On Television,* in which he faults cultural critics for blindly ignoring the changing stakes in their work and reminds them that "facility with the games of cultural criticism—their 'I know that you know that I know'—is not universal. Nor is the ability to spin out elaborate 'readings' of the 'ironic and metatextual' messages cynically manipulated by television producers and ad

Amy L. Blair is a writer who lives in Boston.

A Philosopher's Story

MORTON WHITE



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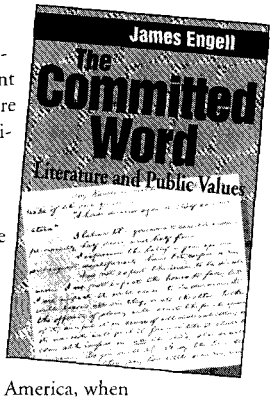

"James Engell's *The Committed Word* is an excellent collection of essays that are at once different and similar. They consider both the political and moral involvement of writers with their culture and the preservation and communication of that culture's best values. The work is especially valuable since it concerns nineteenth-century America, when this continent was significantly more subject to British thought and letters than it is now."
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people. Anyone who thinks otherwise has simply surrendered to a populist version of one of the most perverse forms of academic pedantry."

Above all, this is a call for common sense: the more arcane your theoretical tricks to arrive at "resistance," the more likely, says Bourdieu, that you are losing the very consumers whose resistance you seek. In addition, public calls for cultural authority seem to be growing louder, and the inflexible cult stud has little context for answering the majority's apparent support for the V-chip and other cultural regulations.

Michael Kammen has never been in danger of succumbing to the excesses Bourdieu condemns. His oeuvre, which includes the Pulitzer Prize–winning *People of Paradox,* is a model of complex, rigorous cultural history that is populist by virtue of its constant awareness of social conditions. His latest book, the ambitious *American Culture, American Tastes,* aims to provide us with a historically nuanced context not just for interpreting our current cultural predicament but, perhaps more important, for understanding the various critical stances jockeying for airtime on an increasing number of pundit shows. He writes to correct an oversight in the current explosion of cultural-studies treatises on American mass and popular culture: namely, that critics' political needs obscure and even distort readings of culture, leading to anachronism, terminological sloppiness, and general misappropriation of the subjects of the past. These can result only in imprecision in coping with present cultural situations.

One of the greatest problems is with the terms *popular culture* and *mass culture,* which Kammen sees being used interchangeably, without an awareness of the profound differences between the two phenomena or their occasional overlap in American history. He introduces several criteria for distinguishing the two: scale (are several thousand people involved, as in a carnival, or several million, as in a televised sports event?); accessibility (is technology necessary for access?); purpose (is knowledge pursued for practical utility or for its own sake?); and, most important, whether an activity is participatory and interactive or passive and private. So, for example, playing an arcade game at Coney Island would be an example of participation in popular culture, whereas surfing the Web on your home computer is an activity possible only in the era of mass culture.

This is not just an academic distinction, because the terms *mass culture* and *popular culture* are rarely used neutrally. *Popular culture,* as Kammen notes, is generally thought of as somehow more authentic, emanating from the people, whereas *mass culture* is imposed from above—and despite his best efforts to remain objective, these values are certainly not absent from his own analysis. In fact, they tend to be awkward when Kammen turns to contemporary debates over cultural value and attempts to align the ongoing classification of cultural products as high-, middle-, or lowbrow with his distinction between the mass and the popular—and particularly with the in-between periods of "proto-mass culture," which he dates from the 1930s to the 1960s.

Kammen traces the formal stratification of taste levels to Russell Lynes's 1949 *Harper's* essay, "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," but he recognizes that the struggle over taste had deep roots, citing Hawthorne's mid-century annoyance with the popular appeal of domestic novelists, the infamous "d—d mob of scribbling women." He goes on to cite historical instances of taste levels both diverging and, intriguingly, converging (for example, Mozart's *Magic Flute* as high classical music staged for popular pleasure, and the broadening of lyceum attendance in nineteenth-century America). But his principal interest is in the process of change in the twentieth century. He argues that, paradoxically, public debate over where to draw the lines between high-, middle-, and lowbrows became most intense at the very moment when the lines between audiences were blurring. *Life* magazine picked up Lynes's somewhat tongue-in-cheek essay in a summary article, accompanied by a chart on which readers could situate themselves as high-, upper-middle-, lower-middle-, or lowbrow according to their tastes in clothing, salads, drinks, and charitable causes. Soon brow height was common fodder for pageants, cartoons, and etiquette experts, and Lynes's career was secured by the demand for sequels and spin-offs.

But in practice, it seems, the distinctions between taste levels grew less significant as society became more oriented to mass culture. Be-

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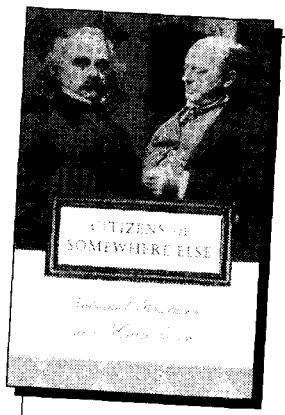
yond the often-noted sympathy of highbrows for lowbrows (Virginia Woolf: "In so far as I am a highbrow . . . I love lowbrows"), there was also a tendency for the nascent mass media to want to educate its audience in high-culture tastes. And once we arrive at the 1960s, as mass production becomes the subject of high art and full massification kicks in, all media products become aimed at a common denominator. Academics embrace the middlebrow, which is now one and the same with the lowbrow, and this all but eliminates the highbrow. All, in Kammen's telling, are part of a great, swirling mass culture.

The 1960s are the point at which the two registers that Kammen is juggling—the popular/mass and the high/middle/low—begin to tangle. Suddenly the opposing forces in the current culture wars become high culture and mass culture. Have the middle- and lowbrow merged to form mass culture? Is the authority of high culture or elite culture eroded enough to make it just another enclave of popular culture? If Kammen were not so careful with his semantics at other points of the argument, this slide might not vex, but his own criteria call for clarification. And the stakes here, again, are not just a matter of academic territory, particularly given Kammen's intriguing analysis of the changing status of the cultural critic in American society.

Kammen is sketchy about cultural authority in the period before the the Civil War; citing international observers, he asserts the absence of a tradition of cultural authority in the new United States, and he describes the challenges that the very presence of such authority would pose to both social and political democracy. The irony, of course (and one that Kammen fails to make explicit), is that the initial dilemma facing would-be cultural authorities in the young nation was precisely the residual cultural authority still exercised by England and Europe. In the address from which this journal takes its name, Ralph Waldo Emerson, exercising considerable cultural authority and speaking to a group of future cultural authorities, stressed the need for indigenous critics, indigenous forms, which would somehow preserve the democratic spirit of the nation.

So it is neither so odd nor so novel as Kammen seems to find it that, by the late nine-



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teenth and early twentieth centuries, both quality and mass-market magazines were brimming with tips on every aspect of daily life, providing the cultural authority for which the American public was apparently yearning. Kammen is compelling, though, once he begins tracing the public's growing distrust of cultural authorities through the 1920s and 1930s as public opinion became "itself . . . a semi-autonomous form of cultural authority." Public opinion began to encroach on the previously unassailable position of the "professional critic" but did not at first silence cultural authority; Kammen notes that new "versatile non-specialist" critics, like Walter Lippmann, I. A. Richards, and, later, the *Partisan Review* group, commanded (and still command) tremendous respect across political and class lines. Nonetheless, their heyday, the 1930s to the 1950s, also saw the rise of Disney and the major Hollywood studios, whose "covert manifestations of cultural power" would gradually disperse, and mute, the voices of cultural authority. Kammen cites Irma Rombauer, Alex Comfort, Martha Stewart, and Oprah Winfrey as latter-day cultural "authorities," but surely Oprah and Martha, with their eponymous corporations, have already begun to parlay authority into power.

Kammen rightly calls what has occurred over the past three decades "one of the truly momentous shifts in American culture," but he does not trumpet it. Citing Tocqueville, he worries that "with few guidelines, and with every taste considered equal to every other, an excess of mediocrity is encouraged to flourish." The cult studs seem to be one step behind this curve, shifting to agree with the public distrust of authority, then codifying and professionalizing this distrust just as the public clamor for authority grows louder and Oprah's book club becomes the surest route from midlist to best-seller list.

I often wanted Kammen's history of the American front in the culture wars to be more contentious, but in its own muted way, it does provoke. On reflection, its most important task may be to provide a context for all would-be cultural critics at the turn of a new century—and in this category I would include everyone. Public opinion is not going away, and it may as well be informed. Then we can get polemical.

Early Modern Family Values

FLESH AND SPIRIT: PRIVATE LIFE IN EARLY MODERN GERMANY
By Steven Ozment. Viking. $29.95.

Reviewed by PAULA FINDLEN

During the past two decades, Steven Ozment has written prolifically on two interrelated subjects: the German Reformation and the experiences of families who lived through those difficult and interesting times. *Flesh and Spirit* revisits that familiar territory, examining the interactions of five Nuremberg families in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Their loves, hopes, fears, and disappointments are meticulously reconstructed in a series of vignettes designed to immerse readers in the world of the early modern family.

What did the early modern family most value? Not individualism, as Ozment frequently reminds us, since his Nuremberg clans thought about themselves as members of an extended community. To the exasperation of their parents, sons might squander their education and indulge their desires for student revels and Italian furs, but they almost always retained some sense of obligation to their families, who supported and sustained them. Children might embark on a marriage without the full consent of their parents, but they usually effected a reconciliation with family propriety through the respectability of public ritual. Though not absent in this world, individual desires were tempered by a strong sense of family as a means of personal, material, and moral fulfillment. The whole, it seems, was always greater than the sum of its parts.

Such sentiments, at least, strongly characterized the leading mercantile, scholarly, and religious families of early modern Nuremberg. The attitudes that Ozment charts, using the rich trove of family papers that he has uncovered, reflect the values of an urban society that

Paula Findlen teaches Renaissance history and history of science at Stanford University.

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existed in many parts of Europe between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. Similar behavior can also be found in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's masterful vignettes of fifteenth-century Italian families in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*; Barbara Hanawalt's excellent studies of late medieval English family life in *The Ties That Bound* and *Growing Up in Medieval London*; and in other recent histories. Nuremberg, in other words, was not that different from Florence, London, or a good dozen other European cities, all filled with prominent families striving to maintain honor and prosperity by instilling the values of work, education, and responsibility in their offspring, who they hoped would marry well and fill their own houses with children.

Recent scholarship on the history of the European family has greatly enriched our understanding of the nature and importance of family in earlier epochs. No longer do we embrace a Hobbesian formulation of the preindustrial family as an involuntary and wholly pragmatic set of associations, devoid of emotional content. Nor do we celebrate the preindustrial family as a model of idealized human relationships in which love and affection conquered the oppressive burdens of poverty, hunger, and disease that constrained the lives of many early modern Europeans. Ozment explores the middle ground between these two outmoded stereotypes, adding his voice to the criticisms of such classic works as Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* that portray childhood, and more broadly, familial affection, as something that society had to invent on the way to creating the modern Western family.

Flesh and Spirit implicitly challenges a materialist account of the emergence of the family by demonstrating the important role of faith in guiding familial behavior in the early modern era. The jurist Christoph Scheurl and his wife, Anna Fütterer, had no doubt that it was God who finally blessed them with the first of three sons in 1532—the baby was anxiously ushered into the world by a priest who performed an early baptism—in the wake of ten miscarriages and stillbirths. Faith, too, sustained Lucas Friedrich Behaim during the long winter of 1613, when he awaited his father's approval of

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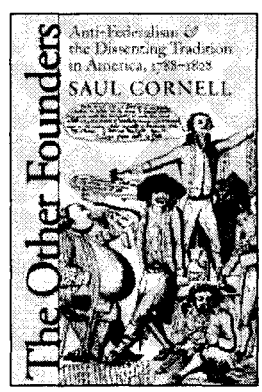

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his decision to marry Anna Maria Pfinzing and attempted to engage in a chaste but amorous correspondence with her. It helped a teenage Sebald Weiser retain his Lutheran beliefs while studying law in Catholic Louvain, far from his family in Nuremberg; it sustained Magdalena Römer Behaim during a difficult correspondence with her eldest son, Paul, whose lack of prudence and willful disobedience made her fear that he would never settle down. Such episodes reflect an acute consciousness of faith as a moderating influence in dealing with the stresses and strains of family.

Similar attitudes are evident in many personal chronicles of this period. But perhaps Ozment is right to suggest that, in a city that played a leading role in the Reformation, the moral framework of family associations was more strongly evident, more easily spoken of in private correspondence among family members, and more prominent in the accounting of the day recorded by the head of the household. None of Ozment's Nurembergers exhibit the boundless enthusiasm for self-assessment and self-criticism that characterize some of the best-known diaries of English Puritans. By and large, they seem to be a contented lot, relatively secure in their place within the city and fairly confident that long-standing family and political connections would serve them well, in bad times and in good. Yet in a world where differences in faith disrupted ancient allegiances, family ties may have become even more meaningful in the face of larger uncertainties.

Ozment's portrait of early modern family life is generally sympathetic. It invites us to ponder the complexities of human relations as historical artifacts. In Reformation Nuremberg, no marriage was a simple transaction, no child was brought into the world without some thought being given to his or her education and prospects, no male adolescent was sent from the household without some nagging concerns about how he would grow into adulthood. Many of Ozment's protagonists are all too recognizable as embodiments of what later came to be known as middle-class values. We can understand pastor Lorenz Dürnhofer's disappointment in his unscholarly, laconic eldest son and recognize his joy in having a second son who continued the family tradition of learning. In a different age, one suspects, Magdalena Römer Behaim would have been a soccer mom who gave her son a pager and a lecture on unprotected sex as he went off to college.

We hear little about the family outcasts, ne'er-do-well sons and dishonored daughters who abandoned, and were abandoned by, their families as being utterly beyond redemption. We can only guess how the affluent families of Nuremberg viewed, and were viewed by, their less prosperous neighbors. Whether an artisan's family would have shared the same values, or expressed them in a similar way, is left to our imagination. Since Ozment has already made the Behaim family—the centerpiece of two of five chapters and indirectly important to other sections of the book—the subject of other studies of German Reformation family life, it would be interesting to see him place the Behaims and their circle of immediate acquaintances in an even broader context that attends to issues of status and occupation as well as religion. It would also be worthwhile to discuss in greater detail the differences between reconstructing the "private lives" of patrician males and reconstructing the less well documented lives of their mothers, sisters, and daughters—who are crucial to Ozment's portraits of family life, but who rarely speak except in the world of courtship or about the guardianship of their sons.

Flesh and Spirit is a worthy culmination of Ozment's many inquiries into the early modern family. I am left with a final question, however, regarding Ozment's wish to make the history of the European family a touchstone for reflecting on its late-twentieth-century counterpart, and for critiquing our own expectations of the young. Just as we cannot capture the full variety of early modern family life through an account of five prominent German families, we should remain cautious in making pronouncements about the contemporary family's success or failure in relation to the past. If there is one lesson that emerges clearly from Ozment's book, it concerns the adaptability of the early modern family to difficult times and to changing social structures. We may not choose the same path as a sixteenth-century German burgher, but, then, we do not inhabit his world.

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THE READER REPLIES

PROCRUSTES AND THE CULTURE WARS

We are engaged in a cultural civil war in which both sides are adamant that they are absolutely right, that the other side is absolutely wrong, and that the opposition must be exterminated. Feeling shell-shocked and unable to get a real grip on the problem, I found Philonoë's "At Large and At Small" essay "Procrustes and the Culture Wars" to be rescue indeed. A long course of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR's medicine should restore shattered nerves and stiffen the sinews against the terminal relaxation of popular culture.

ANDREW DONOVAN-SHEAD
Tulsa, Oklahoma

AUDUBON AND THE VEILED LADY

Christoph Irmscher writes that despite "the results of [his] speculative sleuthing," we will never know whether Mrs. André was the actual subject of Audubon's portrait of the beautiful veiled lady he met in New Orleans. We also may never know whether Nathaniel Hawthorne learned of this 1821 encounter and used it more than twenty years later in "Drowne's Wooden Image." Like Audubon, Drowne portrays a woman from a foreign land, is pledged to secrecy, is emotionally agitated in the presence of his model, and finds his sculpting abilities temporarily transformed by the experience. And just as Irmscher finds Audubon's situation to be a "clever inversion of the classic myth of Pygmalion" in which "the person portrayed creates the portraitist and not vice versa," so does an onlooker in Hawthorne's story confide that regarding Drowne, his beautiful and mysterious model also "inspired a genius into [him], and first created the artist who afterwards created her image."

More to the point, in mentioning how the veiled lady experience may have affected Audubon's approach to his work (noting that in *Birds of America* it "had become impossible to separate the object from its maker"), Irmscher's delightful account does not fully examine the incident in the context of Audubon's career profile. Similarly, in proposing 1821 as a watershed period in Audubon's artistic methodology, Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., makes no mention of the veiled lady in his essay "Audubon's Drawings of American Birds, 1805–38" (in *John James Audubon: The Watercolors for* The Birds of America). Considered together, Irmscher's and Stebbins's findings have profound implications.

Three months after the encounter, Audubon's May 23, 1821, letter to his wife reveals the veiled lady's controlling instinct, her impressive artistic ability, and her timely and lasting impact on Audubon. Regarding the sensitive topic of Audubon's birds, the Incognito "praised the few drawings of Birds [he] shewed her the first day and assured [him] that She had no doubt [he] would be well recompensed for Such a Collection." Yet in selecting times for her sittings, she decreed that he "never again [return] with [his] port folio"—conceding, however, that "[she] will manage this once through [his] drawings of Birds."

Having finished his letter, Audubon apparently slept on these jarring recollections before (according to Stebbins) writing Lucy again on May 24, the very next day—hoping his bird drawings "will pay my time," but confessing "sometimes I think well of them; at

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other moments, [I] look at them as daubs and wish they had never existed."

Thus, just as he was about to start his *Birds of America* in earnest, Audubon was clearly feeling anguished and ambivalent about the quality of the many drawings already in his portfolio. What happened next? With no reference to the veiled lady encounter outlined in the previous day's letter, Stebbins reveals that "Audubon at this time developed two quite different compositional formats—one for the small songbirds, another for the larger species, the hawks, owls, and shorebirds." Moreover, he mentions that very soon afterward Audubon began to limit his use of pastels, incorporating far greater use of water color in combination with gouache and graphite.

Following a period of anguished self-doubt late in May, there are significant changes, both in format and in media. "He literally started over," Stebbins recounts. "Though he already had drawings of as many as two hundred species in his portfolio, with very few exceptions none of these earlier works met his new standard, and they were replaced by new drawings over the next seventeen years as he worked feverishly and obsessively on his great project."

Indeed, when artistic doubts about his bird drawings as possible "daubs" merged with poignant recollections of "such lessons" as he had absorbed in his sessions with his Incognito, it seems that the largely self-taught Audubon experienced a wrenching creative anagnorisis, one that triggered a revised approach to the whole artistic ornithological oeuvre that we would come to know as the superb *Birds of America.*

Was Audubon's experience with the veiled lady, about whom Irmscher writes so tantalizingly, in fact the catalyst for this sea-change? What, indeed, might *Birds of America* have resembled had Audubon's mysterious muse not accosted him on a street corner in New Orleans in February of 1821, telling him to "call in 30 Minutes at [the lady's house] and walk upstairs"?

"I will wait for you," she had added. We're glad she did.

LEE GAILLARD
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I read Christoph Irmscher's article with excitement, since I wrote about that same Audubon manuscript in the January 1985 issue of *Audubon.* My piece was certainly not among those that quote the manuscript in "cautious snippets and sanitized excerpts," as Mr. Irmscher suggests most biographers have done.

To me, Audubon's autobiographical sketch is a key to understanding his life and character. It documents in a highly symbolic way a turning point in his search for, and creation of, an identity—an issue that stemmed from his illegitimate birth and resulted in his ultimately donning the persona of "The American Woodsman." Despite the enormous significance of this little-recognized manuscript, it was a mistake to have claimed, as both your editorial footnote and Mr. Irmscher assert, that the "Veiled Lady" had never before been published as Audubon wrote it. It appeared in the March 1948 issue of a publication known as "The Collector." Still, nothing compares to sitting at a table in the American Philosophical Society and reading it in Audubon's original hand with the overwritten note to his wife, Lucy, asking her to "Keep it snugg." I hope Mr. Irmscher's re-publication stimulates a deeper look into both Audubon's life and his literary and pictorial oeuvre.

DAVID J. PERLMAN
Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania

Christoph Irmscher replies: I was delighted to read Lee Gaillard's and David Perlman's entertaining letters. Who would have thought that 170 years after it was penned, Audubon's naughty narrative would induce others to make their own spirited responses? Gaillard suggests far-reaching consequences for Audubon's encounter with the veiled lady. This is territory where I fear to tread, especially since the evidence of Audubon's early work suggests that he wasn't suddenly shocked into greatness but evolved gradually. I think it is safest to read the letter, as I did, not so much as a record of a real event but as a clever allegory of the artistic process. Here indeed the parallels with Hawthorne's story, while coincidental, can be illuminating. But remember that while Audubon's creativity soared, Hawthorne's aptly named Mr. Browne, after his brief holiday in the world of genius,

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plummeted back into his usual life of drudgery and mere mechanical competence.

Like Mr. Perlman, I am excited by the "Fair Incognito" letter, and I thank him for drawing attention to his own contribution. I did in fact read his elegant *Audubon* piece, a brief and breezy paraphrase of the artist's encounter with the "Incognito" as it had already been expertly told in the biographies of Alice Ford (1964) and Alexander B. Adams (1966). I might note, however, that Mr. Perlman freely rewrote and revised Audubon's text without acknowledging his interventions, thus putting quotation marks around sentences Audubon never wrote. As to Mr. Perlman's second contention, I nowhere claim to have been the first to publish Audubon's text. I'm familiar with the transcription printed in "The Collector"; this was, after all, the version used by Alice Ford in her 1969 publication *Audubon, By Himself.* What Mr. Perlman doesn't mention is that "The Collector" is a sales catalogue privately printed by the New York manuscript dealers Walter R. Benjamin Autographs. The March 1948 issue—so rare that in Massachusetts only the American Antiquarian Society boasts a copy—contains the relevant portion of Audubon's letter, in a hastily executed transcription marred by several mistakes. Since my text offers what I believe to be a faithful and error-free version, I stand by my claim to have reproduced the letter "exactly as Audubon wrote it."

That said, the oversights in "The Collector" are perhaps excusable. After all, the Benjamins' purpose was not publication but profit. "We are confident," they wrote, that the sample just given "fully warrants the price of $500 asked for this most interesting item." Those were the days.

PRACTICE WITHOUT PRINCIPLE

Usually when I read the SCHOLAR, I have the feeling that I have misspent my life reading all the wrong books. Not so with Wendy Steiner's "Practice Without Principle": I have actually read, either superficially or "with attention," Hume, Burke, Milton, Bunyan, Addison, Kant, Ransom, and Nietzsche. That still leaves a great many of her authors unread; but my excuse is that most of them are probably very modern, and perhaps they will be winnowed out by time. Humanism expresses the wisdom of the ages, which is (in the exact words of a wise man who really said this to me) "greatly to be preferred to the wisdom of the age."

ARTHUR H. KING, JR.
Audubon, New Jersey

THE INVISIBLE MAN AND THE INVISIBLE HAND

Paul A. Cantor sees an insoluble contradiction in H. G. Wells's *Invisible Man.* The invisible man appears to represent both the evils of the free market (the invisible hand) and, somehow, socialism too, as the character's increasingly terroristic acts take on a redistributive nature. But Cantor is missing the point: these acts of radical redistribution are *not* socialism as far as Wells and other advocates of careful economic planning were concerned. If anything, such acts represent precisely the opposite of socialism—a radical individualist who has adopted all of the assumptions of capitalism and feels hurt that he enjoys none of the payoffs. This is alienation presented as psychosis. (Unfettered markets lead to psychosis.) Cantor comes very close to this point when he describes the invisible man in terms of Nietzschean *ressentiment,* but his undifferentiated view of socialism leads him to assume, mistakenly, that any act of redistribution qualifies as socialism. And since he knows that Wells was a socialist, he assumes further that Wells must be advocating this! The clear message is that unplanned, unregulated economies lead to a pathologically radical individualism so destructive that societies are forced to adopt totalitarian measures in order to control it.

This message is characteristic of British socialists at the turn of this century, especially the Fabians with whom Wells associated: a quick glance at the writings of G. B. Shaw or Sidney and Beatrice Webb confirms this. Wells's implied caution about the motives and results of radical action illustrates the very principle upon which the Fabian Society based its name (Fabius, who defeated Han-

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nibal through caution, not defiance). Non-Fabian socialists like R. H. Tawney—another shaper of the British Labour Party—display the same conviction that socialism and freedom go hand in hand, that a regulated economy is the only way to restore moral balance to people's economic actions and thus protect them from abuses by other individuals and the state. George Orwell's sense of this, and his resulting suspicion of Stalin, was one source of his ambivalent relationship with mainstream socialism later in the twentieth century.

Seen from this perspective, Wells's novel does not present such a contradiction at all. The failing is not due to any confusion on Wells's part, but to Cantor's clinging to current, ahistorical definitions of socialism and capitalism that present them as bipolar opposites, muddling the internal distinctions that were present at the time of Wells's writing. (What socialism is now is not necessarily what it was then!) Nevertheless, I am glad to see someone like Professor Cantor taking on the study of H. G. Wells. I believe his analysis of Wells's literary fate in relation to the triumph of modernism is dead-on, and I look forward to a serious treatment of Wells's work.

LAURA SINCLAIR ODELIUS
Northwestern University

Paul A. Cantor replies: Laura Sinclair Odelius suggests that I am confused about H. G. Wells's socialism. But anyone who has read widely in his writings knows that the totalitarian strand I analyze in *The Invisible Man* only grows stronger over the years. In most of his utopian visions of the future, above all in both the book and film versions of *The Shape of Things to Come*, the new centrally planned order comes about through worldwide violence and indeed all-out war. And though Wells opposed fascism, amazingly he wrote in 1938: "Maybe we overestimate the value of that idle and slack go-as-you-please discussion we English folk enjoy under our democratic regime. The concentration camp of today may prove after all to be the austere training ground of the new freedom."

Odelius has created a new mode of argument: innocence by association. For some reason, she expects us to believe that just because George Orwell was an anti-Stalinist, Wells must have been one too. Here in fact is what Wells wrote about Stalin in 1934: "I have never met a man more candid, fair and honest, and to these qualities it is, and to nothing occult and sinister, that he owes his tremendous undisputed ascendency in Russia." In general, Wells was a great admirer of Stalin and speaks of him almost as a personal friend.

Odelius also wants to impute the moderate views of the Fabian socialists to Wells simply because he at times associated with the group. His relation to the Fabian Society was extremely complicated; it is well documented in Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie's *The Life of H. G. Wells: The Time Traveller.* Wells always had grave doubts precisely about the moderation of the Fabians, and wanted to bring about socialism in a more revolutionary, speedy, and violent manner. Wells did not share the Fabians' interest in what Odelius calls "careful economic planning." Beatrice Webb wrote of him: "The weak part of Wells' outfit is his lack of any detailed knowledge of social organisations."

As for Wells's vexed relation to the Society, he joined the Fabians in 1903 and abruptly offered his resignation in 1904. In 1906 he shocked the Society with his manifesto *The Faults of the Fabian.* His 1906 tract *The Misery of Beasts* ridicules the Fabians for operating within politics as usual in Britain, chiding them for their belief that "some odd little jobbing about municipal gas and water is Socialism, and backstairs intervention between Conservative and Liberal is the way to the millennium." As many of Wells's writings (including those advocating genocide of inferior races) demonstrate, for him, unfortunately, the way to the millennium was through blood.

A convenient summary of the dark, totalitarian side of Wells's imagination can be found in Leon Stover's introduction to his edition of *The Island of Doctor Moreau.* One reason I prefer Wells's scientific romances, like *The Invisible Man,* to his later prophetic writings is that in the early works at least he was ambivalent about totalitarian socialism and not yet ready to embrace it wholeheartedly. As I argue in my essay, Wells's socialism has a peculiarly Nietzschean cast to it, and if Odelius thinks that socialism is historically in-

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compatible with a form of individualism, she should read Oscar Wilde's "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," in which he argues that socialism is precisely individualism. And if she is going to cite Shaw against my view of some British socialism as Nietzschean, she had better take a look at *Man and Superman.*

IS THE UNIVERSE DESIGNED?

In "The Podium," Steven Weinberg, Nobel Prize winner, states: "The universe is very large, and it should be no surprise that, among the enormous number of planets that support only unintelligent life and the still vaster number that cannot support life at all, there is some tiny fraction on which there are living beings who are capable of thinking about the universe, as we are doing here." What kind of language (and logic) is that "no surprise"?

"The five boroughs of New York City are very large, *and it should be no surprise* that, among the enormous number of its inhabitants who do not walk and the still vaster number who do not like to walk at all, there is some tiny fraction who are able to levitate."

JOHN LUKACS
Phoenixville, Pennsylvania

John Polkinghorne maintains in "The Podium" that science reveals a universe that is "rationally beautiful and transparent to us." To the extent, however, that he claims that science reveals to us a "rationally beautiful" universe, as opposed to a horrifically chaotic one, or one somewhere in between, he is merely stating his personal taste. To the extent he claims that science, or any other human pursuit, reveals a universe that is "transparent" to us, he is exposing a foolish hubris.

RALPH E. AVERY
Rockville, Maryland

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Millennial Relativity

JEREMY KNOWLES

Most forecasts fall into one of two categories: prophecies of doom and prophecies of bliss. Doom seems to be more common. Remember Chicken Little? Remember the prophet Jeremiah, who was so gloomy about mankind's prospects that he has a whole literary tradition named for him?

Perhaps the most extremely gloomy group are those who calculate when the end of the world will come. Cotton Mather made several attempts at this. First he said it would arrive in 1697. That year came and went, so he recalculated and settled on 1716. He spent the whole of that year "in an agony of anticipation," and he seems almost to have been disappointed when nothing happened. I don't know if it's relevant, but Cotton Mather was passed over *three times* for the presidency of Harvard, and those experiences may well have made him think about the end of the world.

Then there's the second category of predictions: prophecies of bliss. I hope that if you encounter one of these, you'll scrutinize it just as you would any other improbable idea. Even as the millennium ends, remember that both some doom and some bliss will come your way, whatever the date or the year. Garry Wills recently pointed out that

> if we removed all the page numbers from *War and Peace,* it would not take anything away from the meaning of the novel. Nor would restoring the numbers deepen the story. . . . The numbering of years and centuries and millennia is as arbitrary a way of flagging reality as is pagination. The flow of life is not deeply altered by the fact that December 31 is assigned to one year, and January 1 to another.

So don't worry about the end of 1999. Remember Einstein, instead, when he said: "I never think of the future—it'll come soon enough."

—from a talk to incoming Harvard freshmen, September 12, 1999

Jeremy Knowles is Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, where he is Amory Houghton Professor of Chemistry.

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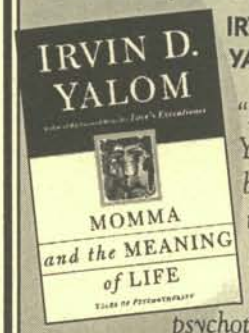

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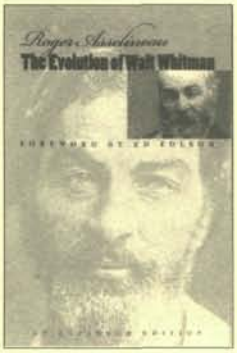

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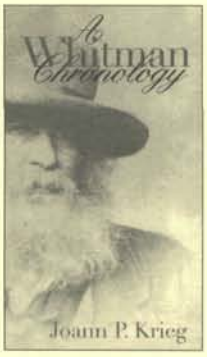

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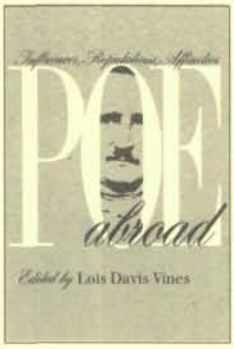

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